



## **Robbins TOD and Industrial Plan Draft Existing Condition Report**

March 2019

# Table of Contents

<b>Robbins TOD and Industrial Plan .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction, Purpose and Context.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Robbins – The Model Black Town .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Inclusive Growth .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>2. Community Profile .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Key Findings.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Population and Employment.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Population.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Employment.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>Land Use and Development.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Land Assembly.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Development Incentives.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<b>Residential Development and Market Potential .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Housing Affordability.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Housing Supply and Demand in Robbins.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>Commercial / Industrial Development and Market Potential.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Industry in the South Suburbs.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Industrial and Commercial Development in Robbins .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Retail Supply and Demand in Robbins .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Robbins Community Power Site.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Solar Development.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Light Industrial / Flex Space .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Sports Facility.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Urban Agriculture.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<b>Transportation .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Public Transit.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Bicycling and Walking .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Roadway and Freight Network.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Street Parking.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Travel Mode.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Transportation Improvements Underway.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>Natural Environment.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Green Infrastructure.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Local Open Space.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Regional and Local Trails .....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Stormwater and Flooding .....</i>	<i>44</i>
<b>3. Previous Plans and Studies.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>RainReady Calumet Corridor Plan for Robbins (2017) .....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>RTA Robbins, IL Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan (2012) .....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Metropolitan Planning Council Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy (2009).....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Village of Robbins Comprehensive Plan (2007) .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Opportunities Analysis and Brownfields Site Identification and Priorities (2004).....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Transit-Oriented Development Study: A Neighborhood Redevelopment Strategy (2002).....</i>	<i>50</i>
<b>4. Community Outreach Summary .....</b>	<b>51</b>

<i>Outreach Activities</i> .....	51
<i>Steering Committee</i> .....	51
<i>Kick Off Workshop</i> .....	51
<i>Key Person Interviews</i> .....	54
<i>Focus Groups</i> .....	54
<i>Online Survey</i> .....	56
<i>Kiosk</i> .....	56
<i>Print and Advertising</i> .....	58
<i>Website and Facebook</i> .....	58

# 1. Introduction, Purpose and Context

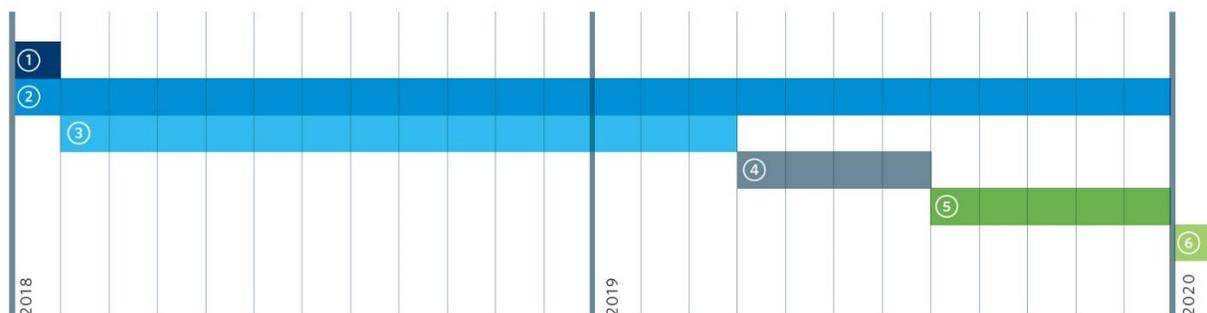
This Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Industrial Plan Existing Conditions Report represents considerable research, analysis and public input gathered by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) over the course of the past year. This report is designed to provide a foundational snapshot of current land use and other conditions and serve to kick start plan development and implementation in order to help move towards a shared vision. A timeline of current and anticipated activities is below.



## Robbins TOD and Industrial Area Plan



JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUN. JUL. AUG. SEP. OCT. NOV. DEC. JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUN. JUL. AUG. SEP. OCT. NOV. DEC. JAN.



- 1. Project initiation
- 2. Community Outreach & Engagement
- 3. Existing Conditions Report
- 4. Key Recommendations
- 5. Plan Development
- 6. Adoption

As a part of CMAP’s Local Technical Assistance (LTA) Program and RTA’s Community Planning Program, an analysis of the opportunities to maximize the benefits of Robbins Park proposed by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is underway. Robbins Park has the potential to spur economic development and provide multiple benefits to the community that go beyond recreation and flood mitigation. Since the park will dramatically reduce the size of the Midlothian Creek floodplain, property owners with a federally-backed mortgage will no longer be required to purchase flood insurance from the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). As parts of Robbins are currently in a floodplain, Robbins Park will create new opportunities for development that were impossible before. In Cook County, stormwater management is regulated by MWRD through its Watershed Management Ordinance (WMO).<sup>1</sup> The ordinance requires that new development provide stormwater management to reduce the volume and rate of stormwater runoff. The park will

<sup>1</sup> MWRD, Watershed Management Ordinance website, <https://www.mwrdd.org/irj/portal/anonymous/managementordinance>.



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satisfy these requirements in some parts of the study area, resulting in lower costs for developers.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is typically defined as a walkable community centered around a transit node. As such, TODs are usually moderate to high-density, mixed-use communities located within a half-mile radius (ten-minute walk) of a rail or bus station and are designed to maximize walkability and transit access. The close proximity to modes of transit provide greater access to regional jobs and destinations and the traffic generated by commuters can attract businesses to the area. TODs are especially convenient for seniors who can access amenities and services without having to travel long distances in addition to providing cost-savings to residents by reducing driving costs. TODs can be centers for community place-making and vibrant street life when they are also linked to larger regional networks of transit, pedestrian, and biking systems. The companion TOD Plan Market Analysis describes some comparable examples of successful TODs that may be relevant to Robbins.<sup>2</sup>

The study area for this report is inclusive of a half-mile radius around the Robbins Metra Station that incorporates numerous existing community assets. Figure 1.0 shows the TOD study areas: a primary study area with closest proximity to the Metra station (the portion outlined in red), and a secondary TOD area that extends west to Claire Boulevard – an important community “main street” (the portion outlined in blue only). The entire area fits within a 10 to 15 minute walk from the Robbins Metra Station as illustrated in the walkshed map (Figure 1.1).

In addition to potential for TOD, Robbins has a unique opportunity for industrial development as well. The vacant Robbins Community Power site, and the area surrounding it (the dotted purple line in Figure 1.0), sits along the Calumet River and is accessible to multiple forms of transportation. The right kind of reuse could create jobs and make the site more attractive. It’s important to note that while we are concentrating on these defined study areas, a number of different land uses will emerge over the course of the planning process that may be suitable in non-designated areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Robbins TOD Plan Market Analysis:

[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study\\_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c)







## **Robbins – The Model Black Town**

Robbins is the oldest primarily African-American suburb in the Chicago region and one of only a few in the nation. Having recently celebrated its centennial, the village reflects the pioneering spirit of its early settlers who incorporated Robbins in 1917. Robbins was embraced by African-Americans migrating from southern towns because it offered a chance to own homes away from segregated communities like Chicago's "Black Belt". Early residents may not have known the village was located in a floodplain but they embraced the chance to own large lots and benefit from jobs in vibrant industries that once dominated the South Suburbs of Cook County.

Robbins' early appearance was not a traditional Chicago street grid. Streets and homes formed organically and in many cases were built before infrastructure like roads and sewers were established. Over time, shops, grocery stores, churches, and social clubs emerged along main streets like Claire Boulevard as the village grew. Remnants of the past remain in the landscape today. The house where the founders voted to incorporate the village still stands at 3234 W. 139<sup>th</sup> Street – within the heart of the TOD study area. Though no longer standing, the nation's first Black-owned airport and flight training school that taught many famed Tuskegee airmen (a league of African-American fighter pilots who fought in World War II) was located in Robbins as well as a black-owned rodeo school. The home of one of the nation's first Black millionaires, S.B. Fuller, still sits along Kedzie Avenue and 135<sup>th</sup> Street. Though in need of repair, the home is now owned by the Robbins History Museum which hopes to transform it into a tourist destination. Numerous homes throughout the village were also former residences of Robbins' long history of accomplished Black celebrities, actors, athletes, doctors, scientists and pilots. Incorporating this rich history into the planning process is strongly desired by the community.

## **Inclusive Growth**

CMAP and RTA are committed to inclusive growth through strategies that provide opportunities for disconnected communities to thrive. Parts of the Chicago region, including the South Suburbs of Cook County, have suffered from a lack of investment for years. Areas like these urgently rely on new pathways for growth to make our region more competitive. CMAP analysis as a part of ON TO 2050 plan principles<sup>3</sup>, suggests that regions that offer economic opportunity for municipalities like Robbins, experience longer and stronger periods of prosperity for everyone. ON TO 2050 also recommends prioritizing investments and ensuring that jobs and economic opportunities are available in disinvested areas.

## **Health and Climate Equity**

Creating walkable communities and TOD can also have health benefits for residents. The most recent study of community health in South Suburban Cook County cites chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, and cancer as disproportionately affecting African-Americans in places like

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<sup>3</sup> CMAP ON TO 2050 Plan Principles: <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/2050/principles#IG1>



Robbins.<sup>4</sup> Chronic diseases are impacted by environmental conditions and access to economic opportunity. CMAP has also released a Health Equity Strategy Paper that explores some of the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)<sup>5</sup> and found that poor health outcomes stem from additional contributing factors like: economic inequality, long commute times, and poor housing conditions. Many of these health disparities are preventable with access to healthy food, parks and open space, and creating communities where people have convenient access to resources and amenities by walking, biking or using transit.

The impacts of climate change should also be considered when planning in communities like Robbins. Impacts have already begun to affect the Chicago region and are expected to continue to bring more frequent and intense storms, increased periods of extreme heat and cold weather, and potentially longer droughts. This see-saw of weather shifts can affect low-income households and the elderly the most. Vulnerable residents for example may not have access to safe and comfortable living conditions during periods of extreme heat or cold, or may not have the financial resources required to rebound from flooding or storm-related property damage.

## 2. Community Profile

### Key Findings

The following are key findings that have emerged from the initial analysis of the opportunities for TOD and industrial development in Robbins:

- **There is demand for new homes and apartments in Robbins** – The housing market area, which includes Robbins and surrounding areas, could support nearly 600 affordable rental units for residents 55 and over, nearly 100 units that can be marketed for families, and more than 700 units that can appeal to younger buyers. There is also a market for new homes ranging from \$100,000 - \$160,000 in addition to one-story ranches and duplexes. As the community gains more amenities, like Robbins Park, the demand for apartments and homes has the potential to increase even more.
- **While there is demand for new apartments, rents are high relative to income for many families** – The median income in Robbins is a little more than \$28,000 and the median gross rent is \$844. About 30 percent of renters pay over \$1,000 a month on rent (50

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<sup>4</sup> Cook County Department of Public Health “WePlan 2020” <http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/about/weplan>

<sup>5</sup> Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning “Health Equity Strategy Paper”, March 2018. <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/839256/FY18-0066+HEALTH+EQUITY+STRATEGY+PAPER+FINAL.pdf/51f36c73-f58a-2dc5-eeba-82f04e0af214>

percent of their income). This leaves many families struggling to pay for other essentials like food and health care during the month.

- **There is potential for small-scale convenience retail around Robbins Metra Station** – With the proposed Robbins Park reducing flood risks, the surrounding area could appeal to a variety of uses like quick casual restaurants, convenience or institutional facilities or a social enterprise coffee shop.
- **Kedzie Avenue has a high potential for larger retail and other uses** – With its high traffic count and visibility, Kedzie Avenue could attract shops catering to residents and truck traffic like laundromats, dry cleaners, community serving non-profit organizations and a grocery store.
- **A social enterprise coffee shop or restaurant with a job training component could be beneficial** – Social enterprise models have been proven to kick-start retail while adding a social service component that supports residents and families at all income levels.
- **Robbins can capitalize on retail spending that is currently lost to nearby suburbs** – Over \$130 million is spent at stores in the surrounding area each year but most spending occurs outside of Robbins. Approximately \$28 million in spending potential is spent elsewhere. Robbins has the potential to capture a portion of this retail gap, however, capturing a significant portion will be highly challenging.
- **The Village of Robbins owns vacant land, which can be beneficial for development** – A large amount of vacant land, particularly in the TOD study area, is owned by Robbins. In addition, numerous tax delinquent properties are available for acquisition by land banks. This represents an advantage in assembling parcels for large-scale development and other desired uses.
- **The use of Tax increment Financing (TIF) should be considered to activate desired areas for development** – Areas in the industrial and TOD study areas, including the west side of Kedzie Avenue, should be explored as potential TIF Districts to support land acquisition, environmental cleanup, site preparation, rehabilitation and affordable housing.
- **Robbins could benefit from light industrial flex space** – Light industrial parks and spaces where a variety of companies can quickly build to suit their needs could attract business and jobs to Robbins. Currently only about 5 percent of demand for these kinds of spaces are being supplied in the area. This provides an opportunity for Robbins to capitalize.
- **A new sports facility could be a draw for investment in Robbins** – Facilities where people can exercise, recreate and participate in team sports can be effective in attracting people to the community. This can in turn stimulate additional businesses like



restaurants and stores desired by the community. Robbins could capitalize on this use as an added benefit for residents and to encourage economic growth.

- **Robbins has abundant transportation options** – Interstates 57 and 294 are both in close proximity and the village has a relatively new Metra station and parking lot. The Cal-Sag River is also accessible for goods transport and recreation. Bus transit can be improved as the current routes do not extend to the Metra station.
- **Robbins is walkable** – Although many residential streets in the TOD study area are in poor condition and lack traditional sidewalks, curbs or gutters, most places like, churches, businesses, the post office, and library can be accessed by no more than a 15 to 20 minute walk from the Metra station.
- **Robbins' infrastructure should be analyzed** – The potential for new development described above depends on the provision of infrastructure and services by the Village. A thorough analysis of existing infrastructure, like sewers, utilities, and roadways should be assessed for its ability to support additional development.



## Population and Employment

An understanding of the demographics of Robbins is essential to identifying needs for improving quality of life for residents. Reviewing population trends, along with racial and economic composition can establish a baseline to identify resources and strategies that support the specific needs of the community.

### Population

The population of Robbins has changed over time. The village reached its peak of nearly 10,000 people in 1970. Many residents describe this period as the village’s “heyday” when street life was vibrant with shops and activity. As Table 2.0 indicates, currently the population is about half its peak. Despite the lower numbers, a strong core of dedicated and engaged residents are committed to staying to see the community return to its glory days. The village also organizes numerous parades and celebrations for current and former residents that can attract thousands.

Robbins has a relatively older population with a broad mix of incomes. The median age is 39 and the senior population (65 and older) comprises 17 percent of the village, which ranks high compared to other parts of the county. The median is currently \$28,296 but over 40 percent of households have incomes over \$50,000. The majority of residents make between \$15,000 and \$49,999. As far as racial make-up, Robbins has historically and continues to be predominantly African-American (82 percent), which is consistent with the village’s legacy. As of recent years, there has been an increase in the Hispanic population which currently makes up a little more than 9 percent. Residents we spoke with embrace the diversity and indicate that this cultural shift is new for the community and is particularly prominent in the schools. Our outreach took this into account and as a result we produced informational materials in both English and Spanish.

**Table 2.0. Population and Households, 2000 and 2016**

	Robbins	Cook County	CMAP Region
Population, 2000	6,635	5,376,741	8,146,264
Population, 2016	5,216	5,227,575	8,501,507
Change, 2000-16	-1,419	-149,166	355,243
Change as %, 2000-16	-21.4%	-2.85%	4.2%
Average Household Size, 2000	3.1	2.68	2.8
Average Household Size, 2016	2.7	2.63	2.7

Source: 2000 Census, 2016 American Community Survey, five-year estimates

### Employment

Robbins’ unemployment rate (22.9 percent) reflects the lack of job opportunities in the South Suburbs. Getting residents into the workforce is a top priority for neighborhood stability. Any redevelopment strategy must consider the urgent need to create employment opportunities that allow residents to have a sustainable quality of life. It’s important to note that Robbins does provide some jobs for residents. As of 2015, there were a total of 438 people employed at



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businesses within the village (Table 2.1). The majority of jobs in Robbins are in education (53.8 percent) and health care (17.3 percent). This illustrates that the numerous health care centers in the village and schools like Thomas Kellar and Horace Mann are not just important academic centers, but job centers as well. It's also important to consider that not all the jobs in these places go to Robbins residents. More than a fifth of people who work in Robbins come from Chicago and surrounding suburbs like Blue Island, Harvey and Calumet City. Likewise, many Robbins residents work in The City of Chicago (32 percent) and about a tenth work in nearby Crestwood<sup>6</sup>. As Figure 2.0. shows, there are also a small number of residents working as far as Frankfort and Tinley Park in the western suburbs Markham further east.

**Table 2.1. All Employment (Primary Jobs), 2006-2015.**

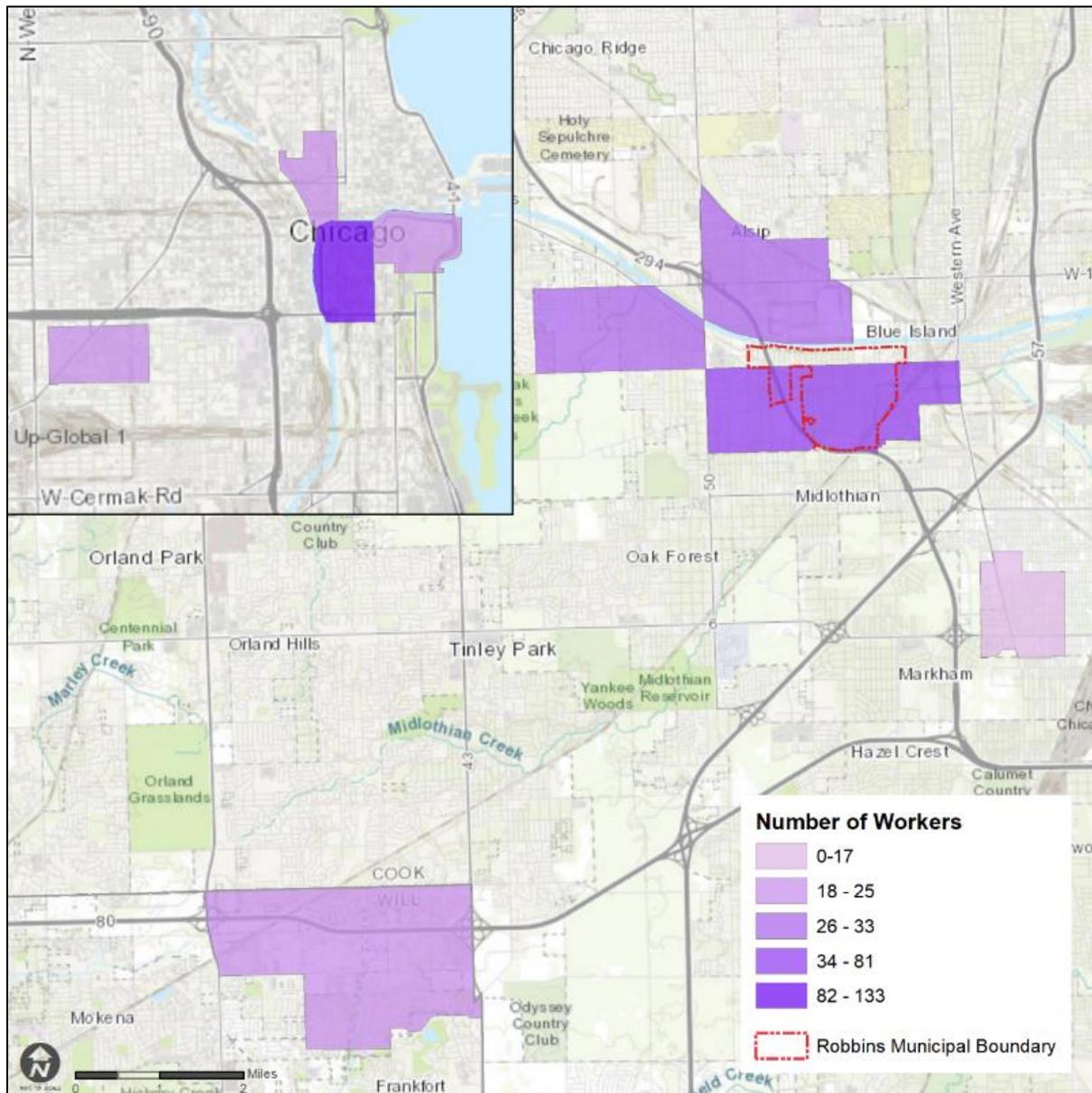
	Robbins	Cook County	CMAP Region
Employment, 2006*	491	2,221,862	3,522,895
Employment, 2015*	438	2,370,505	3,788,375
Change, 2006-15	-53	148,643	265,480
Change as %, 2006-15	-10.79%	6.69%	7.54%

Source: Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program



**Figure 2.0. Where Robbins' Residents Work**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program

## Land Use and Development

An investigation of current land uses in the study area (Figure 2.1) helps identify existing conditions and highlights areas of growth or gaps in development. An inventory of land uses in the TOD and industrial study areas (Table 2.2) revealed that 81 percent of the area (744 parcels) are vacant. The study area also contains some dilapidated vacant structures that need to be addressed for safety and to make the area marketable for new homebuyers and investment.

Auto scrap yards about the TOD study area, especially along the eastern edge of Blue Island to the east and along the northeast portion of the future Robbins Park. As a result, a portion of the park is configured in a somewhat trapezoidal shape to accommodate an auto recycling and towing business. The Village of Robbins owns a significant amount of vacant land (Figure 2.2) which is an important advantage in assembling land for future development.

**Table 2.2. Land Use and Vacancy**

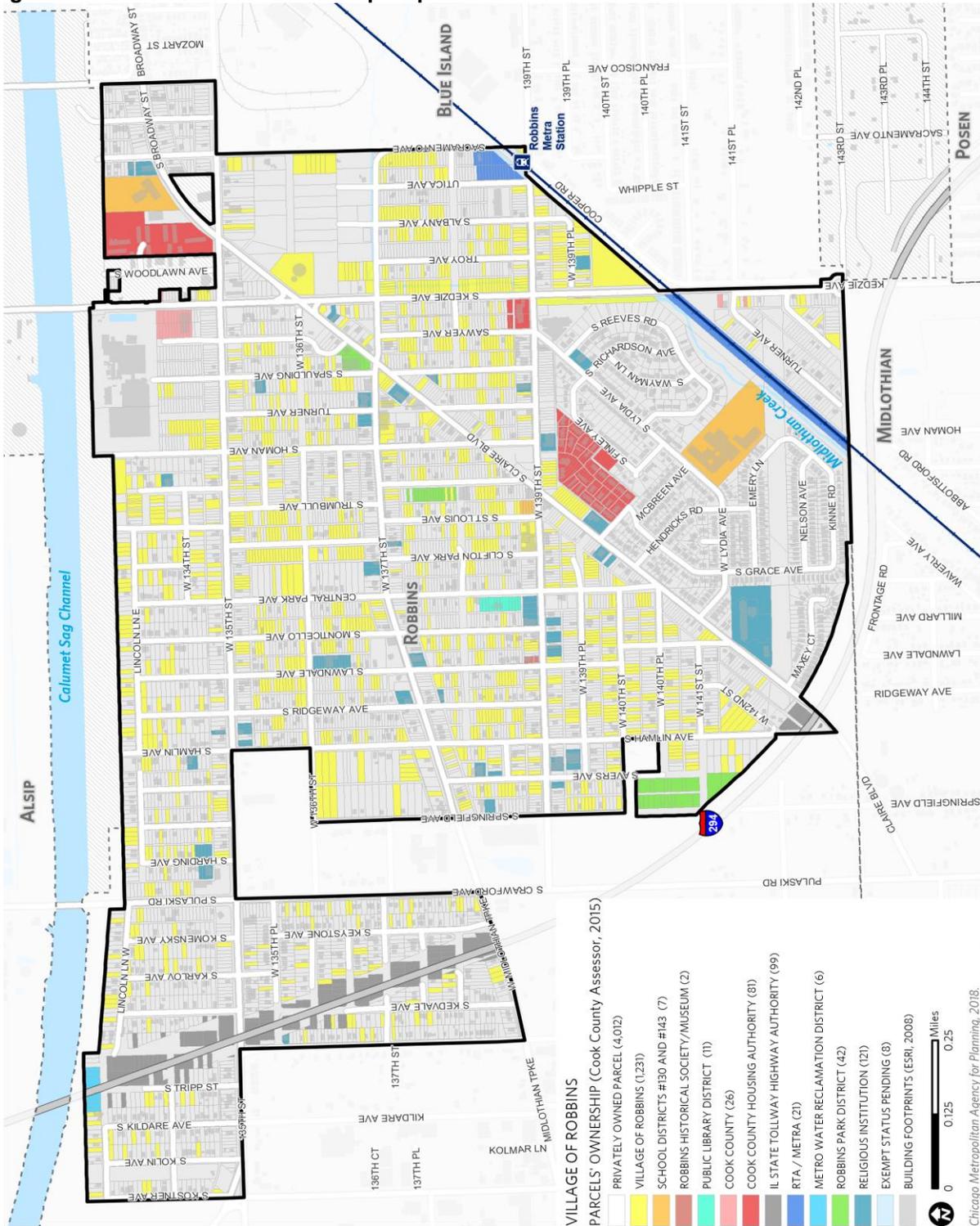
	<b>Parcel %</b>	<b>Acreage %</b>	<b>Parcels</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Vacant Land	81%	58%	744	62.41
Single-Family	9%	6%	80	6.72
Institutional	3%	2%	27	2.20
Multi-Family	2%	3%	21	3.55
Transportation / Other	2%	12%	19	13.42
Commercial	1%	2%	13	2.55
Vacant Building	1%	1%	11	0.84
Industrial	0%	15%	2	16.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>107.72</b>

Source: Field Survey (Teska Associates, Inc. and Valerie S. Kretchmer Associates, Inc.)





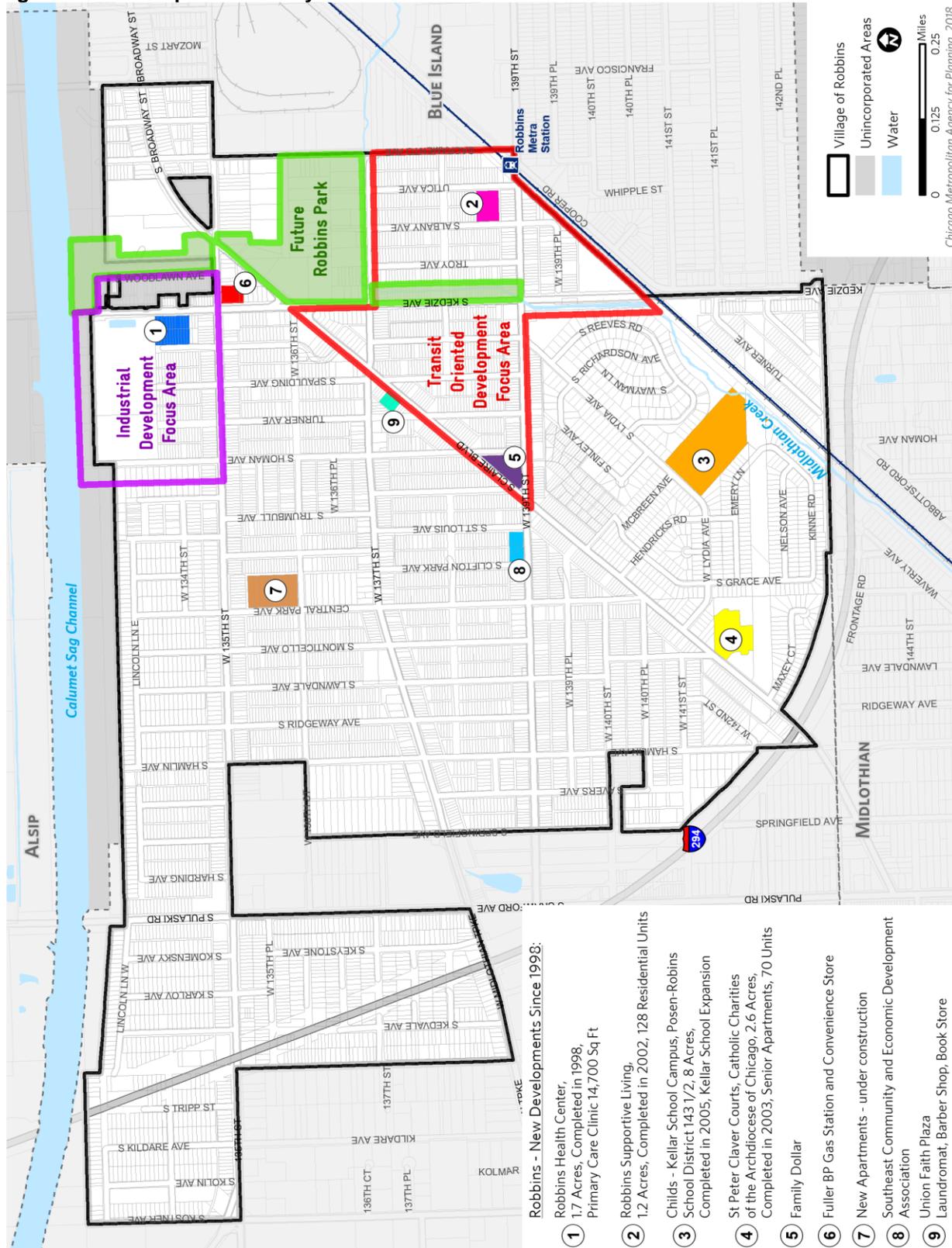
**Figure 2.2. Robbins Parcel Ownership Map**



Since 1998, Robbins has seen a number of new institutions, commercial and housing developments (Figure 2.3). This includes the Cook County Robbins Health Center which contains a pharmacy, clinical and physician services, and fresh food for residents - an important service as Robbins lacks options for healthy fresh food and groceries. The Family Dollar store at 139th Street and Claire Boulevard and the convenience store within the Fuller gas station at 135th Street and Kedzie Avenue serve as primary sources for food for residents. In 2002, a 128-unit supportive living building was built on 1.2 acres just steps from the Robbins Metra station. In addition, a number of scattered housing units and apartment buildings are being built throughout the village by private developers. Five small apartment buildings with a total of 35 units were built in the past five years and two single-family homes were recently completed. Robbins also has numerous faith-based organizations including approximately thirty churches.



Figure 2.3. Development Activity in Robbins



- Robbins - New Developments Since 1998:**
- Robbins Health Center, 1.7 Acres, Completed in 1998, Primary Care Clinic 14,700 Sq Ft
  - Robbins Supportive Living, 1.2 Acres, Completed in 2002, 128 Residential Units
  - Childs - Kellar School Campus, Posen-Robbins School District 143 1/2, 8 Acres, Completed in 2005; Kellar School Expansion
  - St Peter Claver Courts, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, 2.6 Acres, Completed in 2003; Senior Apartments, 70 Units
  - Family Dollar
  - Fuller BP Gas Station and Convenience Store
  - New Apartments - under construction
  - Southeast Community and Economic Development Association
  - Union Faith Plaza Laundromat, Barber Shop, Book Store

## Land Assembly

A key part of a development strategy is the ability to assemble land. Land banks assemble property for development and can be important strategic partners in the redevelopment process, particularly in areas where markets have much room to grow. Two land banks operate in the south suburbs:

- **Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA)** was formed by ordinance of Cook County in 2013 to address the large inventory of vacant residential, industrial and commercial property in the county. The TOD Plan Market Analysis shows tax certificate properties that are available for acquisition and disposition by the CCLBA.<sup>7</sup> The lots were acquired through past Cook County Scavenger Sales in which the CCLBA has the authority to acquire tax delinquent parcels, clear back taxes and other related fees in order to remove barriers for those in the community who want to turn them into a useful purpose.
- The Village of Robbins is also a member of the **South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLDBA)** which was formed in 2012. There are currently 24 municipal members of the land bank, including Robbins. SSLBDA can acquire, clear back property taxes and fees and dispose of property.

The acquisition of tax delinquent properties that contribute to depressed home values in the village is an important strategy for assembling land. There were 261 such properties between 2008 and 2017. In addition to land banks, Cook County's No Cash Bid Program can be a good tool for quickly acquiring property for reuse as private development or for productive village use.<sup>8</sup>

## Development Incentives

Incentive programs available at the local, county, state, and national levels could support future industrial development in Robbins. What follows is a short summary of some established incentive districts that may be useful in catalyzing development in concert with other resources. Figure 2.4 shows geographic boundaries of incentive programs in the village.

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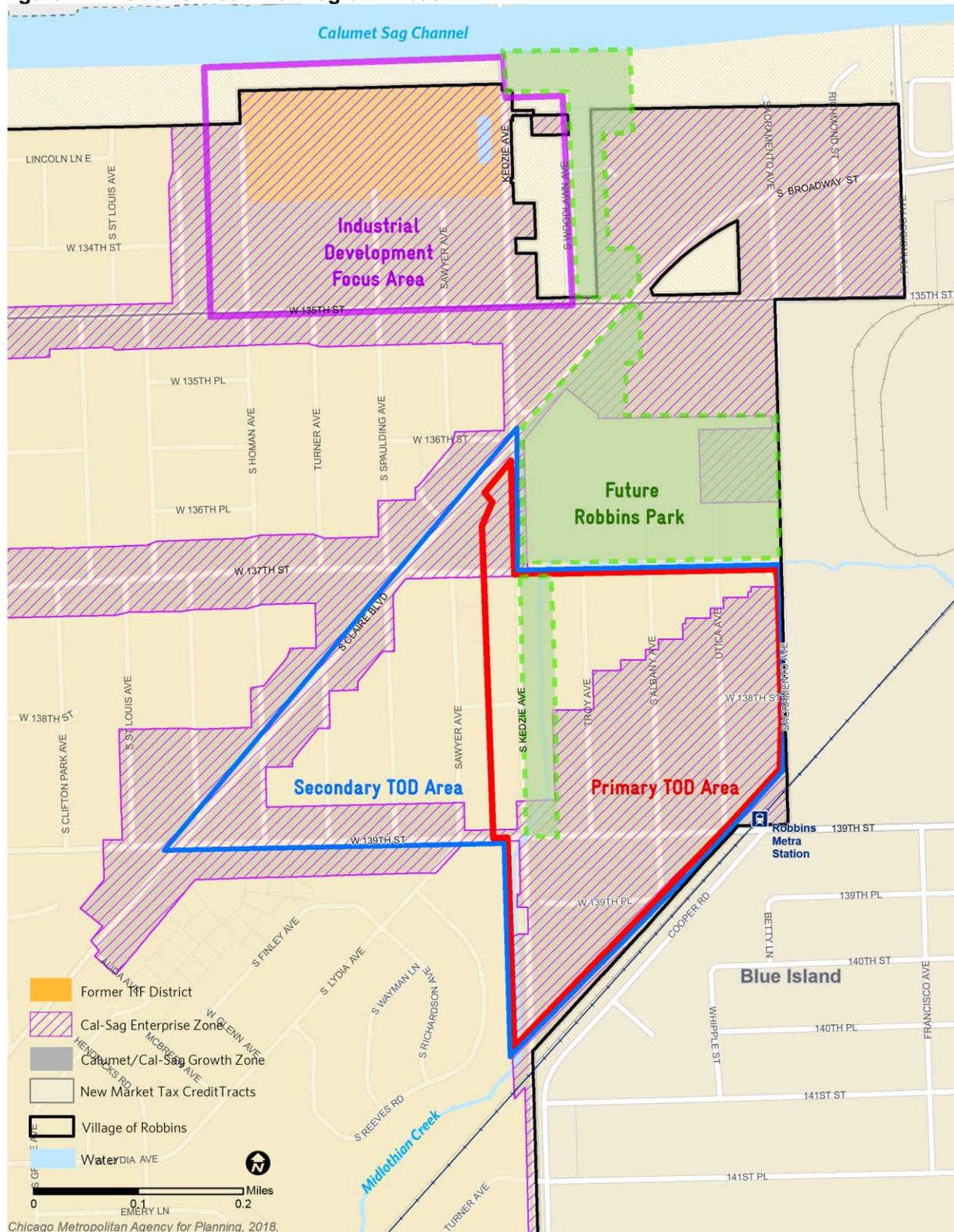
<sup>7</sup> TOD Plan Market Analysis:

[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study\\_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c)

<sup>8</sup> Cook County No Cash Bid Program: <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/service/no-cash-bid-ncb-program>



**Figure 2.4. Robbins Incentive Program Areas**



### **Tax Increment Finance (TIF)**

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a redevelopment tool designed to spur neighborhood revitalization by dedicating property tax increases from a defined area toward a revitalization project. TIF funds can be used for redeveloping vacant buildings, financing infrastructure improvements, and environmental clean-up. Previous plans for Robbins including the Metropolitan Planning Council's Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy have recommended using this tool to stimulate development along potential commercial corridors like Kedzie Avenue and expanding the former TIF around the vacant Robbins Community Power site. Though TIFs should not be instituted arbitrarily, the market analysis also supports exploring establishing TIFs in these areas in addition to the TOD study area.

### **Cal-Sag Enterprise Zone<sup>9</sup>**

Figure 2.3 shows that a good portion of the study area is located within the Cal-Sag Enterprise Zone. This designation was created to stimulate new development, create employment and expand the tax base in the region. New construction and expansion of industrial projects within this zone may qualify for significant real estate, sales tax, and construction cost savings.

### **Calumet/Cal Sag Industrial Growth Zone<sup>10</sup>**

The Calumet/Cal Sag Industrial Growth Zone has the same boundaries as the Cal-Sag Enterprise Zone. A number of benefits are available to property owners, developers, and industrial businesses located within this zone. The designation helps businesses and developers identify sites, expedite permits, and access financial assistance.

### **Cook County Tax Incentives**

Property taxes can be a deterrent to development in the South Suburbs including Robbins. Therefore property tax incentives can be critical to attracting development. Tax incentives generally reduce the assessment level, making development costs more affordable. The Cook County Assessor's Office outlines a number of incentives on its website.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cal-Sag Enterprise Zone <http://calsagezone.com/>

<sup>10</sup> Calumet/Cal Sag Industrial Growth Zone <http://www.growthzones.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Cook County Property Tax Incentives: <http://www.cookcountyassessor.com/PdfForms/Incentive-Forms.aspx>



## Residential Development and Market Potential

An understanding of the housing market is important for evaluating the potential for new homes in Robbins to support Transit Oriented Development. Increasing the supply of high-quality attractive housing in Robbins is vital to increasing the population and attracting other kinds of supportive investment.

Robbins has a large share of long time homeowners and renters. Over 60 percent of the homes in Robbins were built between 1950 and 1969. As to be expected with declines in population, a significant number of homes are vacant (20 percent). The village has a total of 2,177 housing units, of which 76 percent are single-family detached homes and 9 percent are single-family attached buildings and buildings with more than 10 units. Since the supply is mainly single-family homes and most residents are renters (55 percent), this indicates that many renters are living in homes in addition to apartment buildings.

### Housing Affordability

Residents mentioned housing affordability as a significant burden. The cost of rent relative to income is significant for many families. Although the median gross rent is \$844, roughly 30 percent pay more than half of their incomes on rent. This leaves many families stretched really thin throughout the course of the month for other basic needs like food, childcare, and transportation. With respect to home ownership, while the number of foreclosures has been declining since the worst of the recession, a significant number of homeowners are still behind on their mortgages. The mortgage delinquency rate in Robbins is significant at 7.1%. This reflects a need for additional affordable housing and programs to help residents afford to stay in their homes.

Public housing and subsidy programs can be important in areas where affordability is an issue for residents. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program helps families afford rent by paying the portion that exceeds 30 percent of a family's monthly income. Currently 105 Housing Choice Voucher holders live in various buildings throughout the village. In addition, Robbins has two public housing buildings operated by the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC): Edward Brown Apartments, located at 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Kedzie Avenue, and Richard Flowers Homes, located at 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Grace Avenue. These properties have a combined 174 units. Both are being renovated and the waiting lists for new applicants is closed. The 70-unit St. Peter Claver Courts at 141<sup>st</sup> Street and Claire Boulevard is another subsidized senior building in the village owned by Catholic Charities.

### Housing Supply and Demand in Robbins

To understand the housing market in Robbins it is important to look at the surrounding area, therefore the 10-minute drive area around the Robbins Metra station was analyzed. The results show that Robbins can be competitive in capturing demand for new homes and rental units with the right land assembly strategy, phasing and supporting amenities and infrastructure in



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the village. Developers building in Robbins in the early phases will likely want to apply for Low Income Housing Tax Credits through the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA).<sup>12</sup>

Table 2.3 shows the potential for new rental units in the Robbins market area in relation to IHDA’s income thresholds for residents. This analysis reveals that the Robbins market area can support new rental units that can be marketable for a number of different family types and income levels. It is important to note that this new supply represents development in phases over time. These estimates are based on current conditions and demand and can increase as Robbins Park is constructed and the village becomes more attractive to newcomers.

**Table 2.3. Robbins Market Area Demand with Area Median Income (AMI) Thresholds required for Low Income Housing Tax Credits**

Renter Type	Units that market can support	Income requirements
Senior Housing (ages 55 and higher)	469-618	<\$40,000 (60% of AMI)
Family Rental (ages 15-54)	60-96	\$40,000-\$54,000 (60-80% AMI)
Family and younger households	426-582	<\$50,000 (under 60% AMI for four people)
Family and younger households	114-179	Up to \$75,000 (80% AMI)

Source: CMAP, Teska and Associates and Valerie K. Kretchmer and Associates Analysis

Note: These estimates are for Robbins and the 10-minute drive area around Robbins. Robbins may not capture all of this demand.

Homes are relatively inexpensive in Robbins compared to the rest of the region. Recent home sales have ranged widely, from \$7,200 to \$166,000, with a median of \$33,000. A home in the Golden Acres subdivision to the southwest of the TOD study area saw the highest home sale last year at \$172,500 and sales have averaged around \$160,000 in the past two years. This area has larger homes and lot sizes than much of the rest of Robbins and is the only section of the village planned with a suburban layout.

Overall, there is potential demand for homeownership units in Robbins but likely after more renters move into the village. Since the potential for rental units is higher than homeownership in the early phases, the demand for new homes will be stronger after additional rental units are created. Over time, Robbins can support a variety of housing types including three-bedrooms in the \$140,000 to \$160,000 range and one-story ranch or duplexes for seniors in the \$100,000 range. The companion TOD Plan Market Analysis describes land assembly strategies and phasing as well as steps for developers to apply for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> IHDA Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Income thresholds, <https://www.ihda.org/developers/tax-credits/low-income-tax-credit/>

<sup>13</sup> TOD Plan Market Analysis: [https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study\\_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c)

As the market increases and the community gains more amenities, prices for homes can increase. Homes in surrounding suburbs like Blue Island, Midlothian and Crestwood can sell for up to \$250,000. Although Robbins shouldn't expect to achieve higher sales right away, the prospects from nearby towns should be encouraging as it proves that families will invest in the area if it is attractive for them.

## Commercial / Industrial Development and Market Potential

To better understand the commercial and industrial market in Robbins, it's important to look at the broader context of the South Suburbs of Cook County. This area has suffered from disinvestment and an exodus of industries for some time but is poised for a rebound. The area surrounding Robbins has an abundance of retail that support strong neighboring communities. Attracting residents and job-creating industries will help Robbins compete with these communities. An examination of industries most suited for Robbins helps to target investment and market potential sites. With key advantages like abundant access to transportation and strong human capital, Robbins can put together the pieces to begin to capture future investment in the South Suburbs.

### Industry in the South Suburbs

The South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative (SSEGI) aims to drive strategic, large scale, comprehensive economic growth in the South Suburbs, and released a full report in the Spring of 2017<sup>14</sup>. Below is a summary of the best-fit industries with the greatest promise for the South Suburbs that emerged from this analysis. Table 2.4 compares each category by jobs, education and wages.

- **Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TD&L)** - freight and wholesale activities.
- **Metals, Machinery and Equipment (MME)** - metals and vehicle manufacturing.
- **Food and Beverage Manufacturing and Packing** – food packing, wholesaling and processing.
- **Blue-Collar B2B On-Site** - wholesaling businesses that service other companies.
- **Blue-Collar B2B Off-Site** - facilities management, including, janitorial, security, landscaping, and cleaning services.

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<sup>14</sup> South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/content/south-suburban-economic-growth-initiative-ssegi>

**Table 2.4. Analysis of potential industries in Robbins area**

Industry	Employment per Square Mile	Jobs Accessible with HS Degree or Less	Average Wage
TD&L	415.4	38%	\$66,893
B2B Off-Site	355	43%	\$34,891
B2B On-Site	317	37%	\$73,338
MME	219.2	41%	\$61,652
Food and Beverage	174	44%	\$55,020

Source: South Suburban Growth Initiative Phase 1 Report

## Industrial and Commercial Development in Robbins

Industrial, retail and office space make up a small portion of the overall land use in Robbins. The vacant Robbins Community Power site is the only vacant property in this category. One smaller industrial building is located near 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Pulaski Road and is fully leased. As shown in Table 2.5, retail uses make up the remaining 19 percent and are located mostly along Claire Boulevard between 135<sup>th</sup> Street and 139<sup>th</sup> Street. There is no office space in the village.

**Table 2.5. Industrial and Commercial Building Area (in Square Feet) and Vacancy, End of 2Q 2018.**

Land Use	Rentable Building Area	Percent	Vacancy
Industrial**	255,236	80.67%	90.09%
Retail	61,153	19.33%	0.00%
Office	0	0.00%	n/a
Total	316,389	100.00%	

\*\*Includes flex properties.

Source: CMAP Analysis of CoStar data.

Current zoning in the TOD and industrial study areas may not be consistent with future land use goals. As shown in Figure 2.5, the primary TOD study area around the Robbins Metra station is mostly zoned for industrial. Although historically this area may have been intended for industrial uses, the planning process, including market analysis and community feedback, may suggest alternatives. Previous plans including the Metropolitan Planning Council’s Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy have recommended the village update their zoning code to promote residential density around the Metra station.

Likewise, much of the industrial study area is zoned PRR (Planned Resource Recovery). This is consistent with the former Robbins Community Power waste-to-energy use but may not be desired for future recommendations. Additionally, many surrounding parcels that have this designation are inconsistent with current land

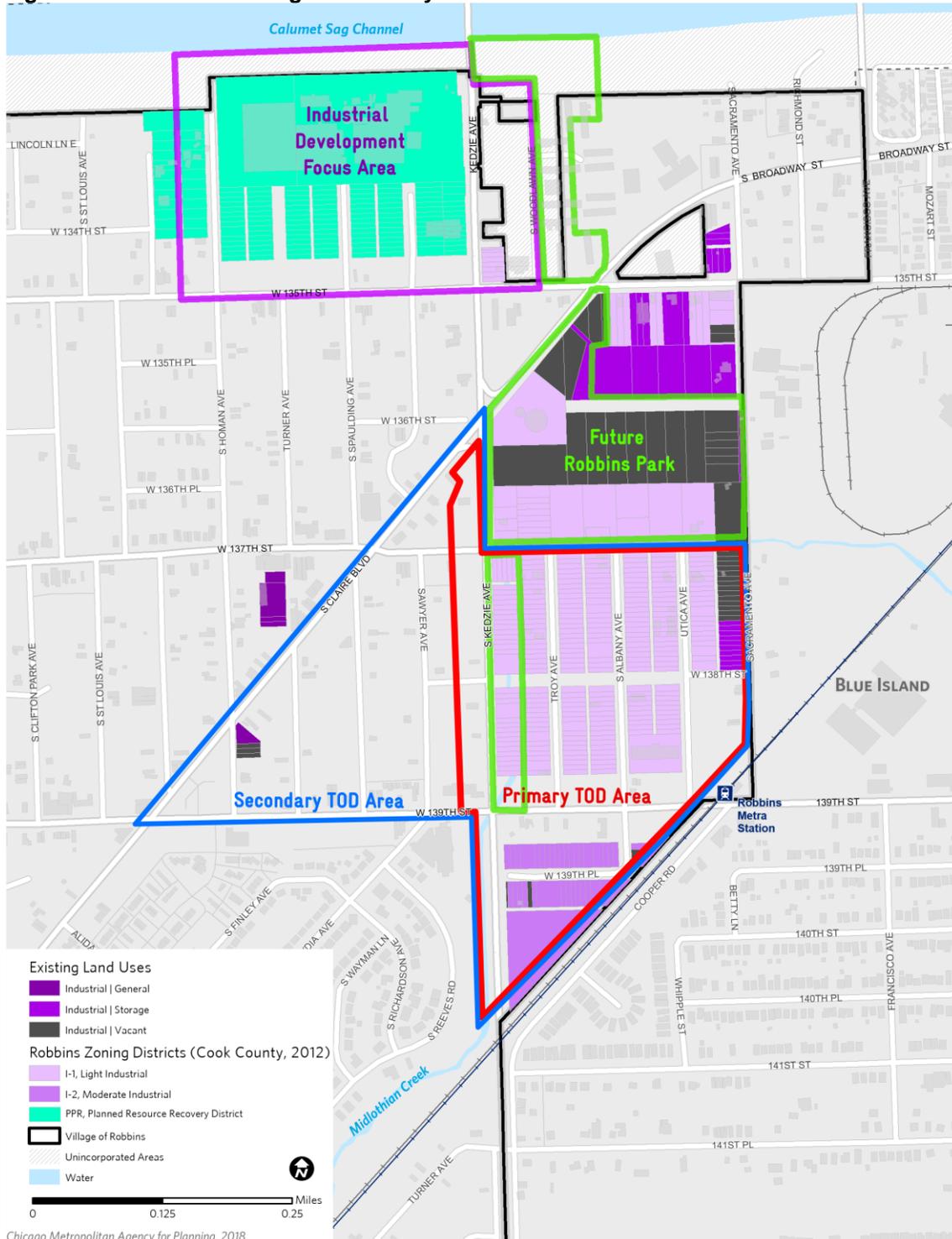


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uses, including Robbins Health Center along Kedzie Avenue, numerous scattered homes, and a church.

**Figure 2.5. Industrial Zoning in the Study Area**



## **Retail Supply and Demand in Robbins**

Robbins is a “retail desert” with very limited shopping options. Residents express frustration with having to leave the village for basic goods and services. It is estimated that the retail gap in Robbins is around \$28 million – this the difference between demand for goods and the supply within the village. This is often referred to as “leakage” as spending is “leaking-out” of the community and going elsewhere due to a lack of local options. This also contributes to low sales tax collection and revenue for the village. The lack of shopping options in Robbins is due in part to population size as the village accounts for only 3 percent of the food and drink market in the area. Table 2.6 shows a detail of the sectors where Robbins has the greatest surplus (left side of the chart) and greatest leakage (right side of the chart).

The immediate area surrounding Robbins has a large retail surplus estimated at \$133 million. This indicates that many people travel from outside of the area to shop in surrounding stores. Crestwood in particular, just to the west of Robbins, has an abundance of big box stores, a major shopping center, and numerous fast food and sit-down restaurants that draw people from throughout the region. Although most of the outside spending is not currently happening in Robbins, these numbers are encouraging in the sense that people will travel to the area for amenities that Robbins can one day take advantage of. As the population increases and amenities like Robbins Park and supporting uses are developed, over time Robbins can be positioned to capture some of the spending currently going other places.



**Table 2.6. Robbins Surplus vs. Leakage by Industry Group<sup>15</sup>**



Source: ESRI 2017 Retail MarketPlace

Attracting businesses to Robbins will likely require incentives. Offering reduced rents to new businesses, ground leases or even land for free should be explored to get the market started. Property tax assessment reductions will also likely need to be used, including Cook County’s Class 7 or Class 8 tax incentive. As initial businesses are created and more people move to the area, momentum will be created that will induce other larger amenities like a grocery store for example. Crafting development strategies takes time and attention and having a key point-person in the village to coordinate resources and respond to interest by developers will be

<sup>15</sup> Data Note (ESRI): Supply (retail sales) estimates sales to consumers by establishments. Sales to businesses are excluded. Demand (retail potential) estimates the expected amount spent by consumers at retail establishments. Supply and demand estimates are in current dollars. The Leakage/Surplus Factor presents a snapshot of retail opportunity. This is a measure of the relationship between supply and demand that ranges from +100 (total leakage). to -100 (total surplus). A positive value represents 'leakage' of retail opportunity outside the trade area. A negative value represents a surplus of retail sales, a market where customers are drawn in from outside the trade area. The Retail Gap represents the difference between Retail Potential and Retail Sales. Esri uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to classify businesses by their primary type of economic activity. Retail establishments are classified into 27 industry groups in the Retail Trade sector, as well as four industry groups within the Food Services & Drinking Establishments subsector.

essential to sustaining momentum. The TOD Plan Market Analysis provides further strategies and phasing for promoting more retail and businesses in Robbins.<sup>16</sup>

Social enterprises should also be explored as a way to kick-start retail investment and support residents through job creation and training. Successful models have been seen in numerous communities including Inspiration Kitchen in East Garfield Park and Curt's Café in Evanston. These enterprises offer food and products to the public while helping residents who have trouble finding jobs in the traditional market gain skills. Non-profit partners could include south suburban colleges or local non-profit organizations.

## **Robbins Community Power Site**

The vacant Robbins Community Power site is located on 16 acres along the Cal-Sag Channel, between South Homan Avenue to the west and Kedzie Avenue to the east. The site was developed as a 50 MW Waste-to-Energy facility in 1997 and processed 1,200 tons of waste daily. Due to environmental concerns and a repeal of tax subsidies, the plant shut down in 2000. A wood burning power plant was later attempted but failed. One use proposed by the site's current owner is an anaerobic digester. A facility of this type would take in organic food waste and utilize anaerobic bacteria to digest the material in airtight containers, free of oxygen. The decomposing material produces biogas made up of carbon dioxide and methane, which can then be compressed for use as natural gas. That gas can then be sold into the nearby Northern Illinois Gas Co. intrastate pipeline.

There are a number of environmental and economic benefits to anaerobic digesters, including reduction of food waste in landfills and the subsequent lowering of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as potential employment opportunities in the operation and maintenance. The site's owner estimates that 150 to 200 jobs could be generated and has committed 60 of those jobs for Robbins residents. There are potentially unwanted byproducts to this proposal to consider as well. The project could take in 100 truckloads a day of organic material from food manufacturers, significantly increasing truck traffic in the community. Although the decomposition process takes place in enclosed containers, the reception and handling of organic material can cause odors. What's more, there are scattered homes, a health center, and a church in the project area that need to be addressed and potentially relocated with a future use of this type.

Figure 2.6 shows the site's proximity to transportation assets while Table 2.7 illustrates the easy accessibility of rail yards, highways, airports and intermodal facilities. Trucks can reach I-294 and the IAIS Blue Island rail yard in less than seven minutes - day or night. Moreover, accessing Midway International Airport can be done in roughly 30 minutes or less. Access to

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<sup>16</sup> TOD Plan Market Analysis:

[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study\\_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c)



rail lifts at nearby intermodal facilities is also easy - a truck can leave the site and have its cargo lifted onto a rail car in about a half an hour. It's also important to note that the site has access to Lake Michigan water – the most sustainable water source in the region – and is accessible to the Cal-Sag channel by barge.

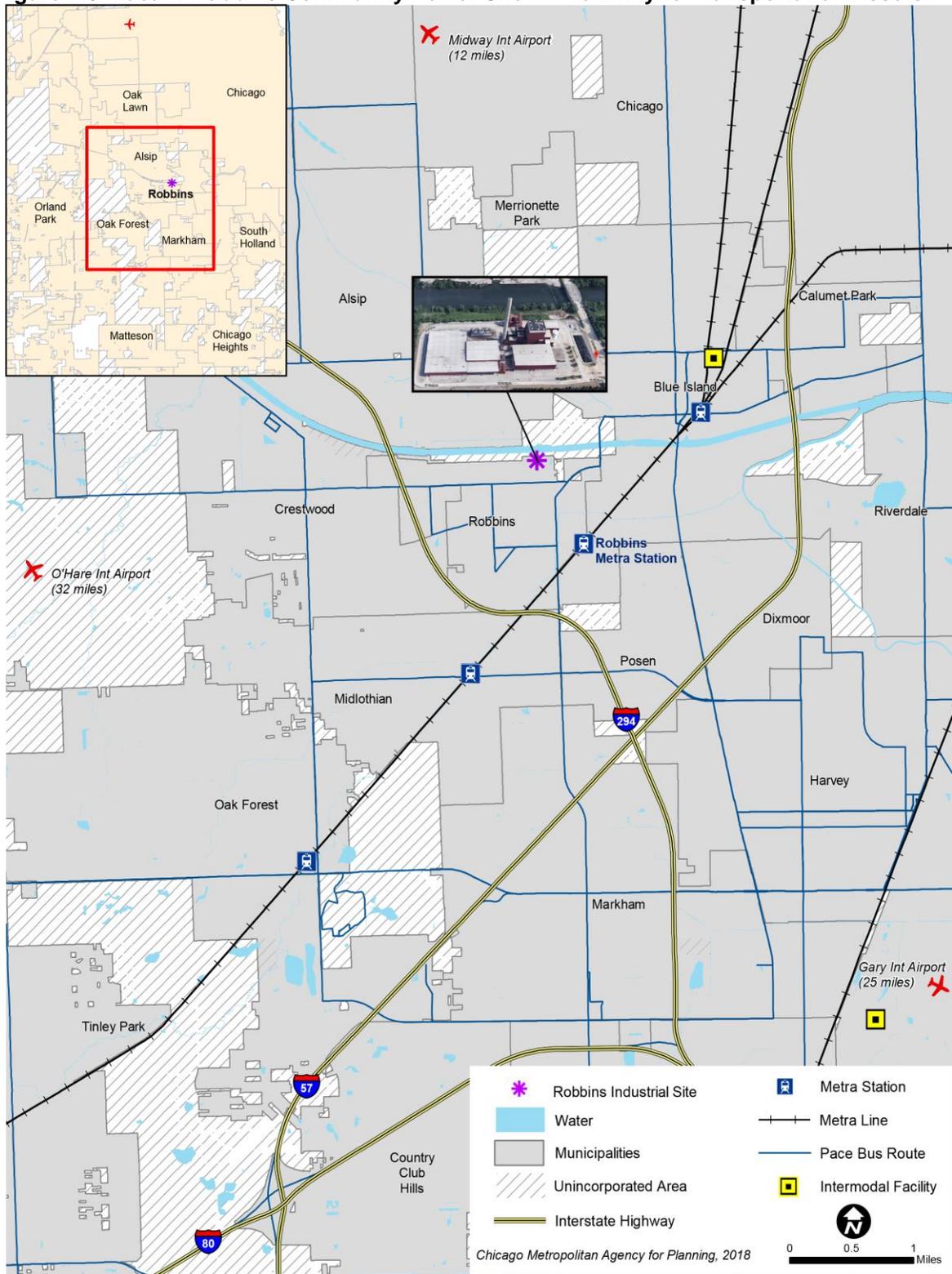


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**Figure 2.6. Vacant Robbins Community Power Site in Proximity to Transportation Assets.**



**Table 2.7. Minimum Travel Times to and From Vacant Robbins Community Power Site to Transportation Assets.**

Minimum Travel Time to Transportation Assets (minutes)			
	Overnight	Morning Peak	Nearest Asset
Interstate	6.3	6.8	I-294 at Cicero Ave
Rail Yard	6.2	6.4	IAIS Blue Island
Intermodal Rail Lift <sup>17</sup>	28.7	33.3	IAIS Blue Island
Airport	28.5	32.9	Midway Airport

Source: CMAP air quality conformity analysis completed in Fall of 2018, model year 2020 (C18Q3 200)

The vacant Robbins Community Power site does not have significant contamination, according to the 2004 Opportunities Analysis and Brownfields Site Identification Priorities study, however some parcels along 135<sup>th</sup> Street in the study area were cited as hazardous. Although the site is 16 acres, there is a large amount of surrounding vacant land that could allow for expansion of up to 47 acres or more. Numerous ideas for reuse have been offered. The Brownfields study suggests exploring greenhouse, aquaculture, geothermal or food processing uses on the site. Residents that we spoke to have offered a number of ideas for repurposing this site as well.

Some suggestions include:

- Recycling center
- Light industrial park
- Businesses incubator spaces for manufacturing startups
- Technical or trade school campus
- Employment training facility/tech education center.
- Artists Lofts

In addition, the community has asked us to explore certain uses in more detail and other ideas have emerged from our market analysis.

## Solar Development

The Village of Robbins has been presented with a proposal to construct a 2 MW ground mount Solar PV Power Plant in the TOD study area. The proposal is to use a combination of lots on a triangular parcel south of 139<sup>th</sup> Street and east of Kedzie Avenue along the railroad tracks. There are a number of considerations when evaluating solar. One of the biggest opportunities is tax revenue generation and the potential to lower energy costs for residents. If the solar energy produced will offset energy load and result in lower energy bills, it can have a significant benefit to residents. Solar can also be effective when combined with new or existing buildings, i.e. on the rooftops of homes or shared community facilities. Many neighborhoods are evaluating “community solar” projects, also referred to as “solar gardens” or “solar farms”,

<sup>17</sup> Intermodal Rail Lift Travel Time measures how long it would likely take to get a container(s) lifted onto a rail line from the vacant Robbins Community Power site. The calculation factors in wait-times at the facility based on a weighted average of the number of cranes at the IAIS Blue Island facility.



which allow residents to obtain a credit on their electrical bill. From a jobs standpoint, often the kinds of employment opportunities created by solar developments are short-term in the construction phase with few long-term sustainable roles. We recommend a careful analysis of the costs and benefits of solar in relation to future land use objectives.

Below are some resources to help further explore the opportunities or constraints to solar development:

- The Environmental Law and Policy Center has prepared a fact sheet for municipalities considering community solar development.<sup>18</sup> The Center also has a Transforming Brownfields to Brightlands (B2B) program that helps municipalities transform environmentally contaminated sites to solar uses.<sup>19</sup>
- The Illinois Solar Energy Association (ISEA) provides resources for communities interested in beginning a solar project and participating in the program.<sup>20</sup>
- Elevate Energy provides solar technical assistance to homeowners, non-profits and government agencies investigating pursuing solar developments.<sup>21</sup>

## Light Industrial / Flex Space

Light industrial flex space could be a viable use for the vacant Robbins Community Power site. Local developers and residents have shared that they believe this use could attract a variety of job-generating companies to Robbins. Flex space is light office or warehouse space often used by light industrial users. Spaces are easily convertible and often not dedicated to individual employees, allowing for “flexible” adaptation according to demand. Market analysis has shown that there is demand for this kind of space. Market analysis has shown that only about 5 percent of the demand for this kind of space is currently being met in the area. At this rate, the market could bear multiple flex space buildings up to about 30,000 square feet that could grow over time. In addition to the industrial study area, the area east of Kedzie Avenue and south of 139<sup>th</sup> Street along the railroad tracks, could also be a viable place for this kind of use with its close proximity to the Metra station.

## Sports Facility

A sports facility is an interesting use to consider to support Robbins Park and stimulate job creation and future investment. Support for this kind of development has come from the

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<sup>18</sup> Environmental Law & Policy Center Fact Sheet: <http://elpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Factsheet-IL-2016-RPS-Fix-Community-Solar.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Environmental Law & Policy Center Brownfields to Brightfields program: <http://elpc.org/b2b/#b2b>

<sup>20</sup> Illinois Solar Energy Association Community solar Project Development: <https://www.illinoisolar.org/Community-Solar-Project-Proposal-Development-Presentation>

<sup>21</sup> Elevate Energy Solar Technical Assistance: <https://www.elevateenergy.org/who-we-serve/building-owners-managers/solar-technical-assistance/>



community during public outreach and from the market analysis. Facilities like this usually require a mix of public funds and philanthropic dollars. Long term operations are often funded by leases to sports leagues and renting out the space for events. One example of a similar facility is the Pullman Community Center in the Pullman neighborhood of Chicago. This development transformed a former environmentally contaminated Brownfield into a facility that can serve more than a thousand weekly participants and provide numerous jobs. A sports facility in Robbins can also provide a unique opportunity to provide options for youth and leverage the community's legacy of producing star athletes that could be good partners and attractions.

## Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture could have many advantages in Robbins. These developments can be employment generators while reclaiming vacant lots for healthy food. In this respect, urban agriculture can also be a good interim bridge use for vacant land, possibly in the TOD area, while awaiting other kinds of development. This use can also support a growing market for locally sourced produce that can supply grocers and restaurants. On an immediate basis, food can be sold directly to customers at places like the regular Robbins flea market. Over time it can be scaled to include indoor spaces and greenhouses or "hoop houses". In many cases, non-profit organizations own the land and coordinate local farmers to subdivide sections. Multiple organizations can also work together on adjacent plots using shared tools and resources, which can be a useful community-building activity. Since the Village owns so much vacant land, there are opportunities to quickly provide such opportunities for lease. This new green space can also be coordinated with Robbins Park and proposed trails to establish a green network. Partnerships can also include a job training component and can give youth and entrepreneurs an opportunity to apply their skills. The Urban Farm Pathways Project and Growing Home are good case studies in establishing these kinds of projects. The accompanying TOD Plan Market Analysis provides more detail on establishing urban agriculture projects in addition to sports facilities and industrial flex space in the village.<sup>22</sup>

## Transportation

A modern transportation system is indispensable; residents must be able to travel quickly and easily around Robbins as well as the larger Chicago region to sustain our economy and quality of life and businesses must be able to count on the timely delivery of their goods. With an aging and congested transportation system, maintenance and modernization are necessary to respond to mobility needs and trends. This section provides information on the existing transportation system within the Village of Robbins, with a focus on roadways, public transit, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

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<sup>22</sup> TOD Plan Market Analysis:

[https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study\\_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c](https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Market+Study_021319.pdf/42e1ea9c-17f1-e003-9e35-45a74c27240c)



## Public Transit

Public transit service is available to Robbins residents via two Pace fixed route buses and a Metra commuter rail station. Transit services in the Village connect to destinations such as downtown Chicago, Midway Airport, CTA rail stations and surrounding communities.

### ***Metra Commuter Rail***

The focal point of the TOD study area is the Robbins station on Metra's Rock Island District (RID) commuter rail line, which provides service between Chicago's LaSalle Street Station and Joliet with 24 intermediate stations in the south and southwest suburbs. Metra owns the majority of the RID corridor and operates 69 weekday trains on the line. Each weekday, 18 trains make stops at Robbins in both the inbound and outbound directions; weekend service is reduced with 10 trains per day in both the inbound and outbound directions<sup>23</sup>. The Robbins station was completely rehabbed in 2008 with new platforms, a new warming house and commuter parking lot.

According to Metra's 2016 station boarding counts, 89 passengers boarded at Robbins on a typical weekday. Although current ridership at the station is up from 77 boardings in 2014, ridership remains below figures from the 1990's and 2000's where it trended between 100 and 150 boardings per weekday. Ridership at Robbins is among the lowest of all stations on the Rock Island District and significantly lower than adjacent stations in Blue Island (575 boardings per weekday) and Midlothian (1,015 boardings per weekday)<sup>24</sup>. Although the 2016 mode of access data for the Robbins station is insignificant due to a low number of survey responses, respondents indicated driving, walking or being dropped off as their primary modes of reaching the station. A commuter parking lot with roughly 150 spaces is located immediately to the west of the station. Parking is available for a daily fee of \$1.50, however, the parking lot is infrequently used by Metra riders because there is abundant free parking on nearby streets, such as Coopers Grove Road, immediately south of the station. Table 2.8 illustrates the ridership trend in Robbins from 1979 to 2016.

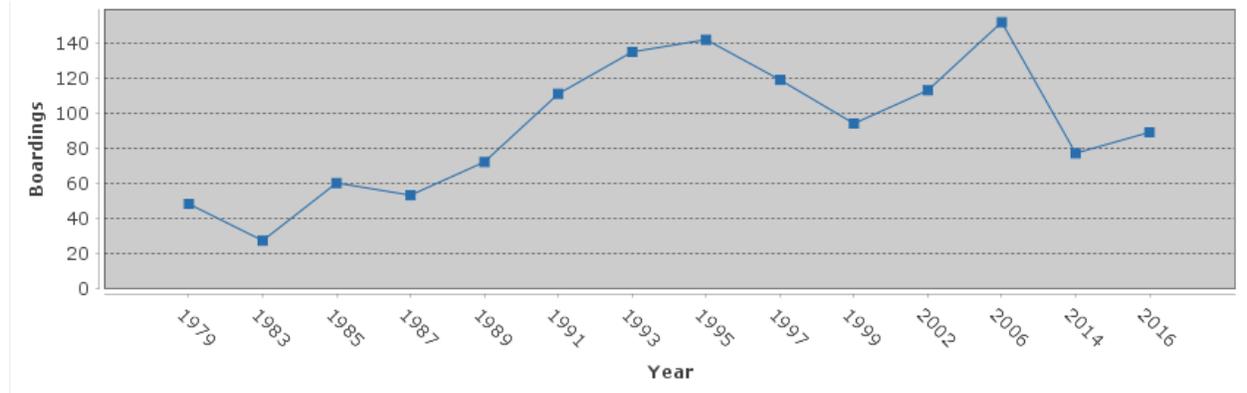
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<sup>23</sup> These include flag stops, which require passengers to request the train to stop at the station.

<sup>24</sup> Source: RTAMS.org



**Table 2.8. Robbins Metra station weekly ridership**



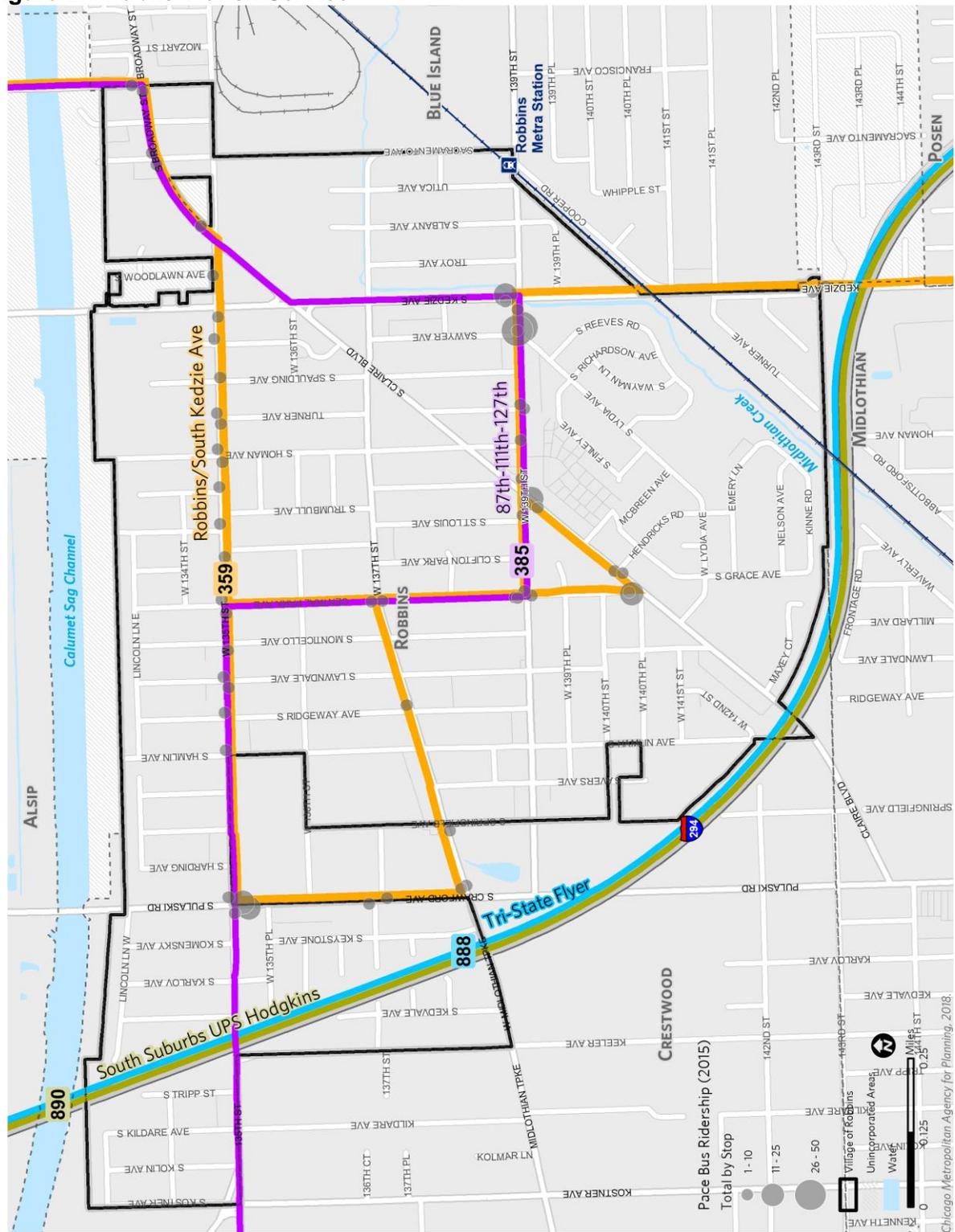
Source: Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics (RTAMS)

***Pace Bus***

Pace routes #359 (Robbins/South Kedzie Avenue) and #385 (87th–111th–127th) provide service to Robbins. Route #359 operates daily between the Homewood Metra Station and the CTA Red Line 95th/Dan Ryan Station with stops on several roadways throughout Robbins, including Kedzie Avenue, 137th Street and 139th Street. Route #385 provides weekday service between the CTA Orange Line Midway Station and Rivercrest Shopping Center in Crestwood via 87th,111th, and 127th Streets with stops on major roadways in Robbins such as Claire Boulevard, 139th Street and Kedzie Avenue. Ridership has been relatively consistent on both routes in recent years with 1,344 boardings on #359 and 713 boardings on #385 according to 2017 annual average ridership data.

Despite Pace service on a majority of the major roadways in Robbins, neither route provides a direct connection to the Robbins Metra station. Routes #359 and #385 both make stops at Kedzie Avenue and 139<sup>th</sup> Street, which is located roughly a quarter mile west of the station. Although this intersection is connected to the station by sidewalks and crosswalks, the distance may pose a challenge for some riders. Stops at the intersections of 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Lydia/Sawyer Avenue, and 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Kedzie Avenue on route #359 had the highest numbers of Pace boardings in the village according to 2017 Pace data. Figure 2.7 shows all transit modes and lines servicing Robbins.

**Figure 2.7 Public Transit Service**



Source: Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics (RTAMS)



## **Bicycling and Walking**

Safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle facilities that provide connections between transit and nearby housing, as well as other amenities and destinations, is vital to a successful TOD. The major roadways that define the study area – Claire Boulevard, Kedzie Avenue, 137<sup>th</sup> and 139<sup>th</sup> Streets – generally provide continuous sidewalks and crosswalks on either one or both sides of the street, although there are gaps at several points. Kedzie Avenue poses challenges to pedestrian crossings as a wide five-lane right-of-way, particularly at 137<sup>th</sup> Street where there is no signalized intersection. Additionally, the signalized intersections at 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Claire Boulevard lack pedestrian signal heads and crosswalk striping is deteriorated.

All of the residential streets within the TOD area, which are bounded by 137<sup>th</sup> Street, 139<sup>th</sup> Street, Claire Boulevard and the Metra station lack sidewalks, curbs and gutters. Many of these streets are badly deteriorated and in need of resurfacing before sidewalks or other pedestrian improvements can be added. Severe flooding continues to be a barrier to the construction of new pedestrian and roadway infrastructure. Therefore, these improvements are contingent upon the implementation of Robbins Park, which will mitigate flooding here. In contrast, the nearby residential streets to the southwest of Kedzie Avenue and 139<sup>th</sup> Street, also known as the Golden Acres Subdivision, have a continuous sidewalk network that connect to Claire Boulevard and 139<sup>th</sup> Street

Currently, there are no bicycle facilities, such as on-street lanes or off-street paths, located in the study area and the Village does not have an adopted bicycle plan. The sidewalks along major roadways, such as Kedzie Avenue and 139<sup>th</sup> Street are likely being used by cyclists as well as pedestrians. Roadways such as 135<sup>th</sup> Street, 139<sup>th</sup> Street, and Claire Boulevard are narrow rights-of-way that carry low volumes of traffic, presenting an opportunity to improve the bicycle network throughout Robbins and improve connections to the Metra station. There is bicycle parking located at the commuter parking lot, however, it is limited to one rack with a capacity of four to five bicycles.

## **Roadway and Freight Network**

### ***Functional Classification***

Robbins provides convenient access to major highways and state routes, including the Tri State Tollway (I-294) through the west side of Robbins, and I-57 east through Posen and Dixmoor. The Robbins TOD study area has a diverse network of roadways, including minor arterials, major collectors, and local roads. The following is a breakdown of roadways throughout the Robbins study area based on IDOT's roadway functional classification system. Figure 2.8 illustrates the roadway structure and Average Daily Traffic counts throughout the Village.



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### **Interstates**

The Tri-State Tollway (I-294) passes through the western portion of Robbins, but the nearest full interchange is south of the Village at 159<sup>th</sup> Street (Route 6). 147<sup>th</sup> Street, also to the south of Robbins, has a half interchange (southbound exit and a northbound entrance). I-57 is located east of the Village in Blue Island and the nearest full interchange is at 127<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Minor Arterials**

Cook County maintains two minor arterial roads in the study area – South Kedzie Avenue and West 137<sup>th</sup> Street, both minor arterials.

### **Major Collectors**

In Robbins, South Claire Boulevard, 135<sup>th</sup> Street, 139<sup>th</sup> Street, and the west side of Francisco Avenue from 135<sup>th</sup> Street to the Little Calumet River are classified as major collector roads. South Claire Boulevard bisects the study area on an angle, while 135<sup>th</sup> and 139<sup>th</sup> Streets provide east-west connections. Francisco Avenue provides connectivity from Blue Island to the north, and a means to cross the Calumet-Sag Channel.

### **Local Roads**

The remaining streets throughout Robbins are classified as local roads and mostly consist of one moving lane in each direction. Local streets are under the jurisdiction of the Village of Robbins.

### **Freight (rail and designated truck routes)**

I-294 is a Class I truck route used by 22,000 trucks daily. I-57 and Western Avenue are designated truck routes to the east of Robbins. No other roads in the Robbins study area are designated truck routes.

Metra's Rock Island District railroad traverses Robbins; the Iowa Interstate Railroad and CSX Transportation have trackage rights to operate freight trains on these tracks. 78 passenger trains use these tracks on weekdays, while an average of five freight trains use the tracks on a daily basis. To the east, in Blue Island, more than 100 freight trains per day use additional tracks owned by the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad and CSX Transportation; these trains cause delays for motorists and can be cumbersome and dangerous for pedestrians crossing to and from Robbins Metra Station.

### **Street Parking**

Street parking is abundant in the study area and generally allowed on all major roadways except for Kedzie Avenue and 139<sup>th</sup> Street between Kedzie Ave. and the Metra railroad tracks. Street parking in the Village is free with no time limits enforced. Some businesses and institutions provide small parking lots.



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## Travel Mode

As Figure 2.9 illustrates, the majority of Robbins residents travel to work by driving alone, although at a lower percentage than the Cook County and regional averages. However, this difference is not due to a higher rate of transit usage, as Robbins residents also take transit to work at a lower rate than residents of Cook County and the region, on average. This difference in both driving alone and transit mode shares is accounted for by the number of Robbins residents that carpool to work, which is more than double both the Cook County and regional averages.

**Figure 2.9. Mode of Travel to Work, Village of Robbins Residents**

	Robbins	Cook County	Region
Drive Alone	62.6%	64.8%	72.6%
Carpool	23.9%	9.0%	8.7%
Transit	7.7%	19.2%	13.4%
Walk or Bike	5.0%	5.6%	4.2%

Source: 2015 American Community Survey five-year estimates

## Transportation Improvements Underway

Robbins has been awarded Invest in Cook funds from Cook County for 2018 to perform a feasibility study for a possible interchange off the I-294 Tri-State Tollway at the Pulaski Road and Midlothian Turnpike crossing.<sup>25</sup> This would make the vacant Robbins Community Power site even more attractive for an industrial user. In addition, Robbins was awarded Surface Transportation Program funds (STP) and Cook County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for road maintenance along 135<sup>th</sup> Street, from Kostner Avenue to Claire Boulevard.

## Natural Environment

Robbins has few spaces for recreation in the village but this will change drastically with the creation of Robbins Park. The potential for new housing and commercial development also provides an opportunity to maximize green infrastructure assets. An evaluation of existing open space will help to create strategies that encourage growth with optimal environmental benefits.

<sup>25</sup> 2018 Invest in Cook award recipients

[https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/default/files/invest\\_in\\_cook\\_2018\\_grants\\_table\\_and\\_project\\_summaries.pdf](https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/default/files/invest_in_cook_2018_grants_table_and_project_summaries.pdf)



## Green Infrastructure

The Little Calumet River Watershed-based Plan<sup>26</sup> outlines green infrastructure measures to improve the water quality of the Little Calumet River. The Village of Robbins is eligible to apply for Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) Section 319 funding to implement green infrastructure within the Midlothian Creek watershed.<sup>27</sup> The Green River Pattern Book<sup>28</sup> is a guide to sustainable development practices for Robbins and other Calumet communities. The guide can help Robbins incorporate green infrastructure and other sustainable measures into their zoning and development ordinances and future development in the village. Additionally, the Metropolitan Planning Council and the Chicago Community Trust is funding ten community-led riverfront projects through the Our Great Rivers vision for the Chicago, Calumet and Des Plaines Rivers project.<sup>29</sup> Currently Robbins does not qualify for participation, however opportunities to expand this program should be considered to continue to leverage economic growth along the Calumet River and the South Suburbs.

## Local Open Space

Robbins currently has a small amount of open space that is owned and maintained by the Village of Robbins Park District. As show in Figure 2.9, Celebration Park and Lindsey Park, located to the west of the TOD study area, are the only current parks in the village. When combined with schoolyards and playgrounds, that tend to also serve as neighborhood parks, this only accounts for approximately 3.1 total acres of parkland. This equates to 0.6 acres per 1,000 residents. In comparison, CMAP's regional plan, ON TO 2050, recommends 4 acres per 1,000 residents. The village's total tree cover, or "urban forest", however covers 36 percent of the land area in the village. This is above average compared with the rest of Cook County.<sup>30</sup> The urban forest includes all trees in an urban environment, including in parkways, yards, streams, wooded areas, and undeveloped lots. Some residents use these spaces as informal open space.

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<sup>26</sup> Metropolitan Planning Council, "Little Calumet River Watershed-based Plan," December 2017, [https://www.mwrld.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/MWRD/internet/protecting\\_the\\_environment/Stormwater\\_Management/Pdfs/Little\\_Calumet\\_WBP/Little\\_Cal\\_WBP\\_App\\_Small.pdf](https://www.mwrld.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/MWRD/internet/protecting_the_environment/Stormwater_Management/Pdfs/Little_Calumet_WBP/Little_Cal_WBP_App_Small.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> The Midlothian Creek watershed is within the larger Little Calumet River watershed. The northwest side of Robbins that directly drains to the Cal-Sag Channel would not be eligible for Section 319 funding.

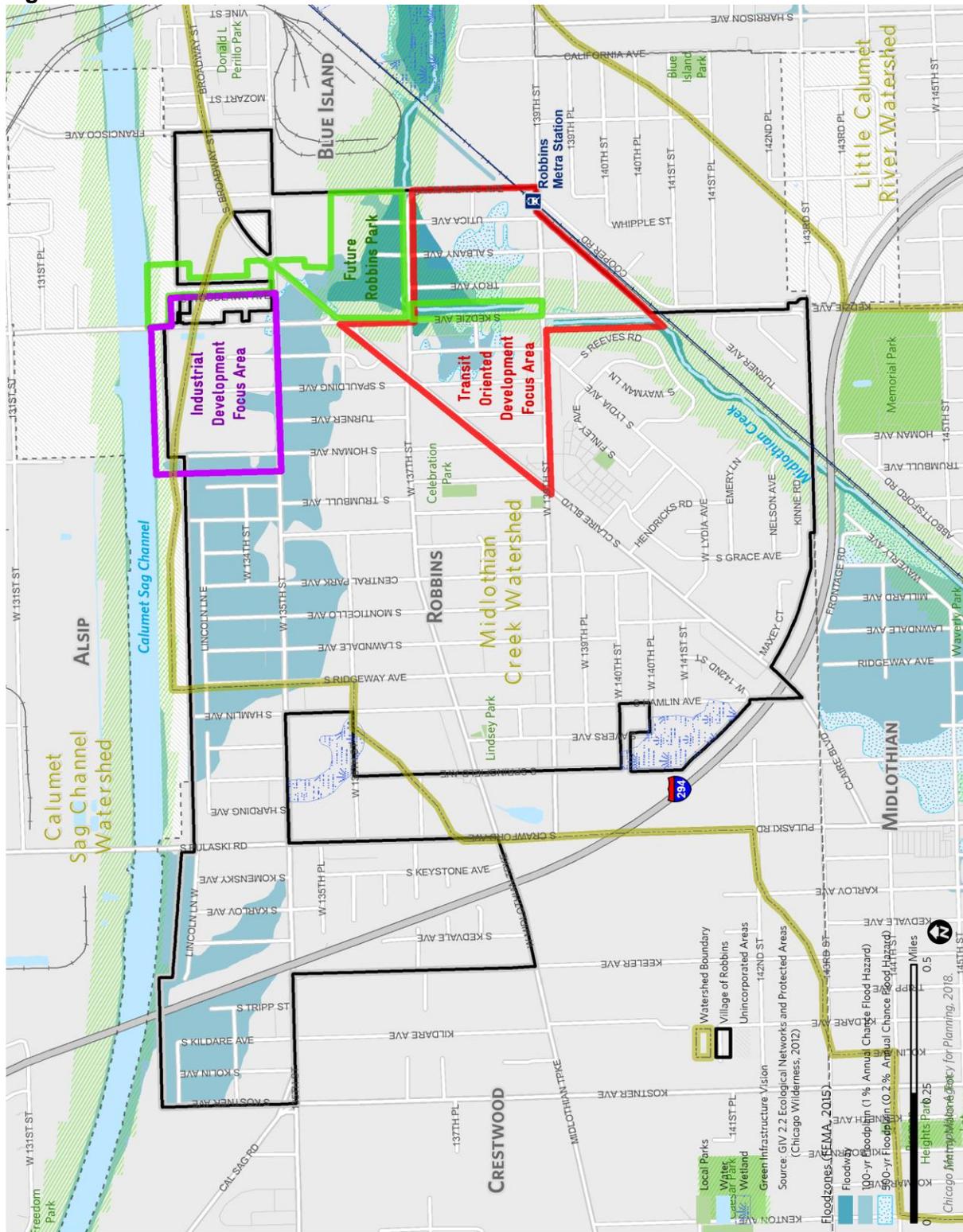
<sup>28</sup> SSMMA and the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation, "Green River Pattern Book," <http://www.blueisland.org/wp-content/uploads/calumet-river-handbook-20090116-calumet-river-web-opt.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Great Rivers Chicago vision <http://greatriverschicago.com/index.html>

<sup>30</sup> Chicago Region Trees Initiative, "Robbins Urban Forest Canopy Summary," <http://chicagorti.org/sites/chicagorti/files/Robbins.pdf>.



**Figure 2.9. Local Parks and Wetlands in Robbins**



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Regional Transportation Authority

## Regional and Local Trails

No trails have been constructed in Robbins, however, several have been proposed. As shown in Figure 2.10 there are proposals to extend the Cal-Sag Trail on the north and south sides of the Calumet River. The Natalie Creek Trail is another proposed trail that would follow Claire Boulevard and link the communities of Oak Forest, Midlothian, Robbins, and Blue Island and potentially connect to the Cal-Sag Trail. Past plans, including the RainReady Calumet Corridor Plan, have recommended establishing a trail connecting Kellar Middle School and Horace Mann School which would run through the heart of the TOD study area and Robbins Park. This could be an important trail for youth who currently maneuver through the vacant lots and establish undefined connections.



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Authority



## Stormwater and Flooding

Historically, the area that became Robbins was once covered with wetlands and is very flat. This flatness causes rainwater to collect in low-lying areas like streets, parking lots, and yards and to seep into basements. A lack of adequate drainage infrastructure exacerbates this issue, which puts some residents and businesses at risk even after relatively small rain events. The RainReady Calumet Corridor Plan goes further with outlining recommendations to improve stormwater management and flood control in Robbins.<sup>31</sup>

Robbins experiences two types of flooding – riverine and urban. Riverine flooding occurs when a river or stream overflows its banks into floodplains - areas adjacent to waterways that are susceptible to flooding. The floodplain commonly known as the “100-year floodplain”, is when approximately 7.5 inches of rain falls within a 24-hour period. Because of the greater frequency and intensity of rainstorms due to climate change, flooding within floodplains occurs more frequently. In Robbins, riverine flooding causes damages to property and infrastructure in the Midlothian Creek floodplain. Development in the floodplains on the east and north sides of Robbins puts residents, businesses, and institutions at risk. The area near Kedzie Avenue and 137<sup>th</sup> Street, where Midlothian Creek takes a sharp turn, is at the greatest risk. Urban flooding occurs when stormwater collects in streets and yards. This is what usually causes basements to flood and sewers to back up. This type of flooding happens outside of the floodplain and may require improvements to the building, property, and local stormwater system to provide protection and better stormwater management.

Chronic flooding has contributed to substantial losses for residents. In 2017, a study commissioned by MWRD found over 100 homes in Robbins to be at risk of flooding when Midlothian Creek overtops its banks.<sup>32</sup> The RainReady Calumet Corridor Plan found that between 2007 and 2011, 316 flood-related insurance claims were filed in Robbins, of which, \$941,901 were paid out in damages.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Robbins suffered severe losses from a presidentially declared disaster in April 2013.<sup>34</sup> Out of 241 applications that were filed for FEMA Individual Assistance from Robbins residents, 106 were eligible for more than \$329,674.<sup>35</sup> These documented damages however are only a fraction of the total impacts that families experience from loss of possessions, time and overall inconveniences due to flooding. Robbins Park will

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<sup>31</sup> CNT, “Rain Ready Calumet Corridor Plan,” March 2017, <https://www.cnt.org/publications/rainready-calumet-corridor>.

<sup>32</sup> Donohue & Associates, Inc., “Wetland Park Flood Control Project in Robbins, Illinois,” September 2017.

<sup>33</sup> CNT, “Rain Ready Calumet Corridor Plan,” March 2017, <https://www.cnt.org/publications/rainready-calumet-corridor>.

<sup>34</sup> Presidentially declared disaster DR-4116 <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4116>

<sup>35</sup> Cook County Department of Planning and Development. 2014. CDBG Disaster Recovery Grant Action Plan. See [https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/default/files/action\\_plan\\_cdbg-dr.pdf](https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/default/files/action_plan_cdbg-dr.pdf)



dramatically reduce flooding and related damages in the study area. Figures 2.11 and 2.12 show the before-and-after flood inundation effects.

### ***Robbins Park***

Robbins Park will significantly expand open space and recreation in the village by adding more than 47 acres of open space that can be enhanced over time with amenities and improvements identified by the community. The park will be constructed in two phases with anticipated completion in 2020. Phase 1 starts just south of the Calumet River on a sliver of land east of Kedzie and extending to 135<sup>th</sup> street. This phase includes a stormwater drainage channel that will also be usable for small boats with boat launch accessible to the Calumet River. This is a good example of how the park will serve both recreational and functional purposes. Phase 2 contains the heart of the park between 135<sup>th</sup> Street and 137<sup>th</sup> Street east of Kedzie Avenue. This will include a large pond to collect floodwater - dramatically shrink the floodplain, while adding a recreational water feature. This phase will also include improvements to Midlothian Creek between 137<sup>th</sup> and 139<sup>th</sup> Street where the creek runs along the east side of Kedzie Avenue. As a result, much of the land along this stretch will not be usable for development however abundant land is available on the west side of the street.

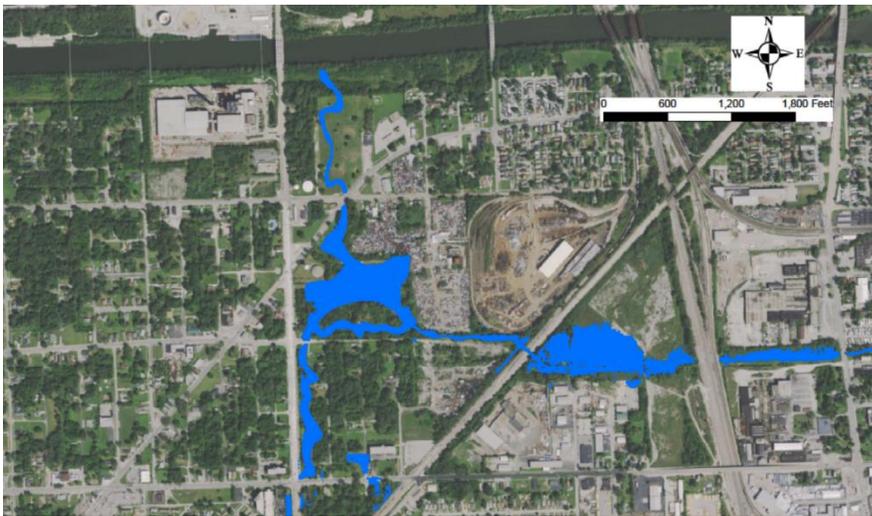


**Figure 2.11. Flood Inundation Area Before Robbins Park**



Source: Donohue & Associates, Inc., "Wetland Park Flood Control Project in Robbins Illinois," September 29, 2017, prepared for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

**Figure 2.12. Modeled Flood Inundation Area After Robbins Park**



Source: Donohue & Associates, Inc., "Wetland Park Flood Control Project in Robbins Illinois," September 29, 2017, prepared for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

### 3. Previous Plans and Studies

Numerous plans and market studies have been performed in Robbins. The following is a summary of relevant studies.

#### **RainReady Calumet Corridor Plan for Robbins (2017)**

In 2017, residents and community leaders collaborated with the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) to address flooding issues in the Village through the development of the RainReady plan. The plan recommends actions to mitigate flooding while achieving other priorities in the communities of Blue Island, Calumet City, Calumet Park, Dolton, Riverdale, and Robbins. The following are key recommendations that emerged from the plan.

- Create a new town center to the west of Robbins Park.
- Establish a village-wide residential cost-sharing program.
- Revitalize the TOD area through development that reduces urban flooding.
- Improves infrastructure for walking and bicycling.
- Incorporate stormwater and native habitat improvements on vacant land.
- Develop a network of green and “complete streets”.

#### **RTA Robbins, IL Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan (2012)<sup>36</sup>**

In 2012 the Village of Robbins worked with RTA to analyze issues related to access to the Metra train station. This report emerged from a half-day meeting with partners including, City of Blue Island, Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), Cook County Highway Department, CMAP, Metra and Active Transportation Alliance. The following are key recommendations from this plan:

- Enhance platform area with benches, bike racks and additional lighting.
- Improve signage to denote commuter parking and guide safe passage across the tracks.
- Repaint cross-walks at all corners.
- Install pedestrian diversion fence on the east side of the tracks.
- Improve the railroad surface with a more even, skid-proof texture.
- Install delineators along 139<sup>th</sup> Street at the railroad crossing to separate pedestrians and commuters from auto traffic and discourage mid-block crossing.
- Create a pedestrian refuge or “porkchop” at 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Coopers Grove Road to provide a safer pedestrian atmosphere, better turning radius for cars, and opportunities for a bike lane.
- Increase the width of the sidewalk on the west side of Coopers Grove Road by narrowing the roadway to shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians.

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<sup>36</sup> RTA Robbins, IL Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan (August 2012), <http://www.rtams.org/reportLibrary/2041.pdf>



## **Metropolitan Planning Council Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy (2009)<sup>37</sup>**

In 2009, The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) along with CMAP, Business Districts, Inc. (BDI), Vandewalle & Associates, South Suburban Mayors and Managers (SSMMA) and the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation developed a vision for Robbins to support the [2007 Calumet River Corridor Economic Development Vision and Strategy](#)<sup>38</sup>. The following are some recommendations that emerged from that planning process:

- Focus on a mix of residential, recreational, and office rather than heavy commercial.
- Build small-lot single family homes around Metra station if multi-family homes and townhouses are not marketable.
- Update zoning code to promote residential density around Metra station and commercial along Kedzie Avenue.
- Acquire properties along Kedzie Avenue for commercial development especially at 139th Street.
- Perform an analysis of infrastructure, including pipe location and capacity, in addition to the electric grid and phone cable lines.
- Create continuous sidewalks and clean and well-kept open spaces.
- Establish a pass-through ordinance requiring developers to pay a service fee for preparation and development of plans that the Village and partners prepare.
- Create new TIF districts along Kedzie Avenue and property around the Robbins Community Power site.
- Capitalize on Robbins history as a central theme of community revitalization.
- Establish an intergovernmental agreement with the City of Blue Island for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) with shared regulation and permitting.

## **Village of Robbins Comprehensive Plan (2007)**

In 2007 The Village of Robbins adopted a comprehensive plan prepared by Town Builder Studios. The following are some of the key recommendations that were identified.

- Require developers to construct new streets and landscaping as a part of new development.
- Construct an underground pedestrian tunnel from the Robbins Metra station to the western side of the tracks to prevent commuters from being trapped on either side by shared freight trains occupying the tracks.
- Provide improved streetscaping with traditional curb and gutter streets, improved light fixtures, clearly marked sidewalks, bike lanes and attractive crosswalks, especially along main streets like Claire Boulevard.

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<sup>37</sup> Metropolitan Planning Council Robbins Economic Development Vision and Strategy

[http://www.metroplanning.org/uploads/cms/documents/CBI\\_Robbins\\_EconomicDevelopmentVisionandStrategy.pdf](http://www.metroplanning.org/uploads/cms/documents/CBI_Robbins_EconomicDevelopmentVisionandStrategy.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Calumet River Corridor Economic Development Vision and Strategy,

<https://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/CalumetRiverCorridorEconomicDevelopmentVisionStrategyDraftFinalReport2007.pdf>



- Improve coordination of train and bus schedules and adjust Pace route so that buses continue to Robbins Metra station.
- Make Robbins a full stop on the Metra schedule as opposed to the current “flag stop” status.
- Create pedestrian-friendly storefronts and design guidelines including conducting a Visual Preference Survey with the community and establish a Special Service Area (SSA) to fund façade improvements, and streetscape beautification.
- Create a signature design feature than can be used throughout village, i.e. a “Village Flower” or other commemorative motif.
- Enforce building codes and ensure new and existing structures are ADA compliant.
- Establish a “Landmark Civic Center” with new village hall, fire station and cultural center along 137th and 139th Streets and Claire Boulevard.
- Establish Kedzie Avenue commercial corridor on west side of street between 137th and 139th Streets with pedestrian and bicycle access and improved street design.
- Establish a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to help with redevelopment.
- Upgrade existing water and sewer systems to accommodate new development.

## **Opportunities Analysis and Brownfields Site Identification and Priorities (2004)**

In 2004, Vandewalle and Associates did an analysis of brownfields under the direction of the South Suburban Chicago Brownfields Coalition (SSCBC). Eight municipalities were studied with the goal of identifying and redeveloping brownfield sites that could have a concentration of vacant, abandoned and contaminated properties. The analysis identified no brownfield sites within the primary TOD study area. The report identifies the lots at the southeast corner of 139<sup>th</sup> and Claire Boulevard as a potential brownfield. This is the site where the outdoor flea market is held. Two potential brownfields were identified in the industrial study area. One at the north side of 135<sup>th</sup> Street between Kedzie Avenue and Homan Avenue and the other on the east side of Kedzie Avenue between 135<sup>th</sup> Street and the Calumet River. The following are recommendations that emerged from this analysis:

- Consolidate parcels along 135th and 139th Streets to create larger redevelopment sites to attract a grocery store.
- Incorporate greenhouse, aquaculture, geothermal or food processing east of Kedzie Avenue, across from the Robbins Community Power site.
- Use vacant lots for community agriculture that can generate jobs. Variations on traditional agricultural production should be explored, like: aquaponics, hydroponics, and vermiculture.
- Land Uses in and around the industrial area should include: office, greenhouses, educational venues, and supporting commercial.
- Concentrate high density, 3-story mixed-use residential and commercial around Robbins Metra station including market-rate housing targeting a mix of incomes. Commuter-retail

uses like convenience stores, beauty shops, banks / ATMs and informational kiosks should also be considered.

- Establish a new plaza and “Village Center” with visitor kiosk on the triangular parcel where Fuller’s Gas Station is currently located.
- Create a heritage museum at 139th Street and Claire Boulevard with a signature architectural style and establish historic markers and heritage gateways at key points in the village.
- Place S. B. Fuller mansion on historic register and create informational kiosk nearby along Kedzie Avenue.

### **Transit-Oriented Development Study: A Neighborhood Redevelopment Strategy (2002)<sup>39</sup>**

A TOD study was performed in 2002 by CMAP’s predecessor, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and URS. The following are some highlights:

- Create 68,000 square feet of retail including a grocery store between 137th and 139th Streets and Kedzie Avenue east of Midlothian Creek.
- Create a mix of single-family, townhouse, condominium, senior housing and apartments.
- Limit set-backs in order to establish pedestrian-scale character and reduce or eliminate side yards between houses.
- Utilize improved streetscaping elements, including: attractive light poles, paving, trees and planters, benches, waste receptacles, signage, bike racks, and informational display kiosks.
- Create streets for pedestrians conducive to hosting neighborhood block parties, community festivals, or farmer’s markets.
- Establish design guidelines that encourage a signature Robbins architectural and streetscape style. This should include ensuring that new construction adheres to LEED environmental quality standards.

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<sup>39</sup> Village of Robbins, Transit Oriented Development Study, A Neighborhood Redevelopment Strategy (July 2002)  
<http://www.rtams.org/reportLibrary/53.pdf>



## 4. Community Outreach Summary

Overall, residents have a strong collective pride in their community. Block clubs, youth groups, and faith-based organizations are the backbone of civic life. Resilience and courage against odds are consistent among residents past and present. Many residents appreciate the quiet, safe, and small-town feel of what they call their “tight-knit village”. Residents desire to return Robbins to better days when there was more street life and economic activity. The potential is evident and consistent with recommendations from previous plans and recent market analysis. The west side of Kedzie Avenue from 135<sup>th</sup> to 139<sup>th</sup> Street and Claire Boulevard from 139<sup>th</sup> Street to Kedzie Avenue have been consistent corridors where development is desired by the community. Claire Boulevard in particular was once a center for community life with a high concentration of shops and stores that the community would like to see restored. Residents express a need for amenities like: a grocery store, dry cleaners, restaurants, and pharmacies – all areas where our market analysis show a deficit.

### Outreach Activities

CMAP and RTA used a number of engagement methods to better understand the issues and priorities of residents and stakeholders in Robbins. We spoke to numerous people over the course of a year and found many consistent themes throughout the planning process. In addition to dedicated meetings, we leveraged existing events with partners like the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and Rain Ready. Additionally, staff spoke with residents during the regularly held senior brunch on June 6, 2018 and hosted an informational tent at the Village’s Juneteenth celebration and carnival on June 30, 2018. We also participated in the Minority Entrepreneurship Interactive Solution Symposium (MEISS) at the Robbins Community Center on March 1, 2019.

### Steering Committee

CMAP worked with municipal staff to form a steering committee to closely monitor progress and activities and assist with necessary resources. Attention was paid to make sure the committee was representative of the make-up of the community. Ongoing members include residents, seniors, business owners, village trustees, and civic leaders. Steering committee meetings continue to be held on a monthly basis on the third Wednesday of each month.

### Kick Off Workshop

The first public community kick-off event was held on April 1, 2018 at Robbins Village Hall where 14 residents and business owners were in attendance. The event was hosted by the Village of Robbins, CMAP and RTA with participation from MWRD and UIC. The workshop consisted of the following sessions:

- **TOD Planning 101<sup>40</sup>** – A presentation that outlined the planning process, scope and scale of the project, and the basics of what the plan will address.
- **An introduction to Transit Oriented Development (TOD)<sup>41</sup>** – RTA shared some examples of successful transit-oriented developments across the country and gave residents an overview of the kinds housing and retail development mix needed for success.
- **Role of Steering Committee** – A review of roles and expectations of the Steering Committee over the life of the project was discussed.
- **Issues & Opportunities Discussion<sup>42</sup>** – An outreach exercise that helped residents identify relevant concerns and develop new ideas was conducted. Participants split up into 2 tables and collectively responded to questions about future development. The following is a summary of their feedback:
  - Participants indicated interest in mixed-use buildings that included first floor small retail shops, restaurants, cafes, dry cleaners, a fitness center, and affordable multi-family housing.
  - In regards to the kinds of affordable housing needed, residents listed: townhouses and senior apartments as their top priorities, followed by multifamily apartments.
  - Residents also expressed a desire for: business development, grocery stores, walking trails, and more recreational facilities.

**Mapping exercise** – Participants were also asked to use materials to represent where they would like to see new development. Teams gave themselves fun names like “The A-Team” and “The Money Team” and competed for the best development strategy. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are maps created by each team followed by a summary of key take-a-ways.

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<sup>40</sup> Robbins TOD Planning 101

<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Robbins+Planning+101+%284%29.pdf/ea2145fa-de37-8020-4665-aa576402ceeb>

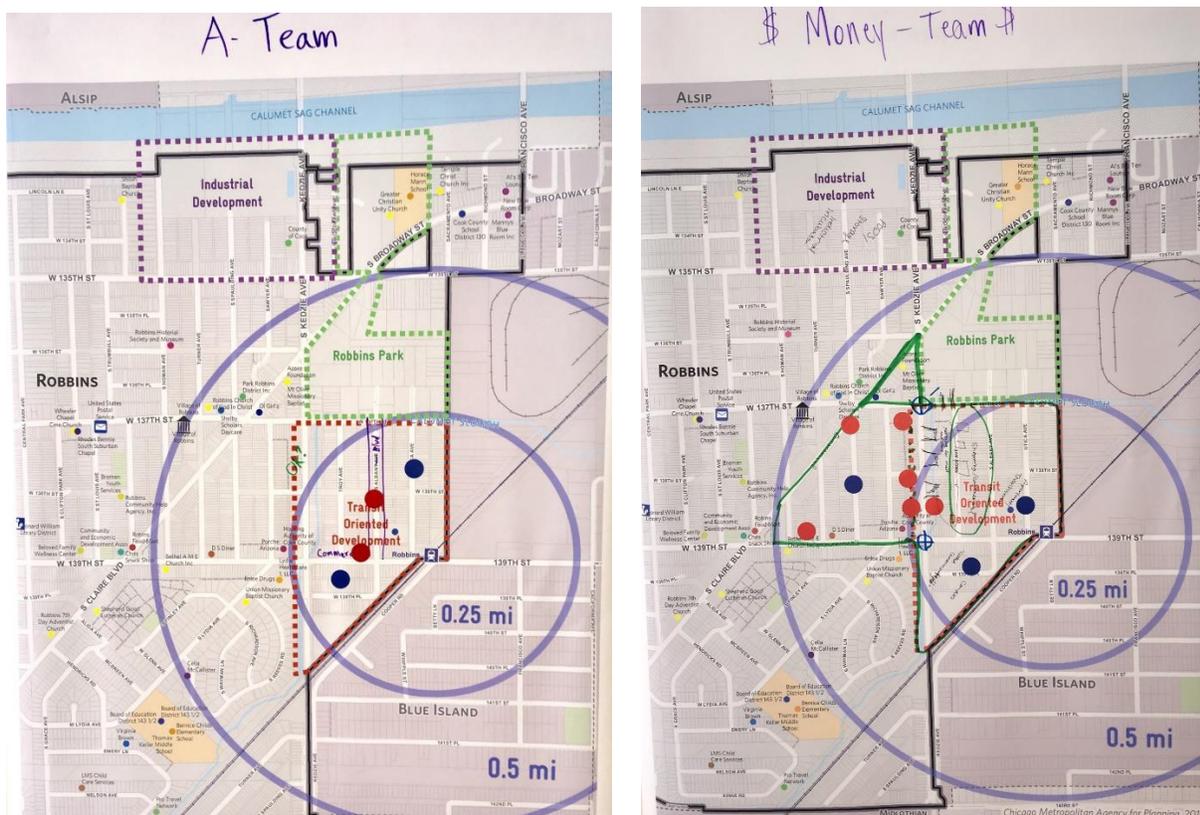
<sup>41</sup> Introduction to TOD <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/Introduction+to+TOD+V2.pdf/f9b59342-e962-6be8-1977-1be51426e982>

<sup>42</sup> Workshop hand-out and responses

<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/0/WorkshopResponses041618.pdf/a557baa5-ed4d-f89e-28a0-972b597c092d>



Figures 4.1. and 4.2. Maps showing community input and desired locations for development



### Residential

- Both teams wanted to concentrate homes along Utica Avenue between 137<sup>th</sup> Street and 139<sup>th</sup> Street just south of Robbins Park.
- One team suggested additional infill housing on lots west of Kedzie Avenue in the secondary TOD study area.

### Commercial

- One team wanted to create a commercial boulevard on Albany Avenue between 137<sup>th</sup> Street and 139<sup>th</sup> Street as a gateway into Robbins Park.
- One team suggested creating a commercial district along Kedzie Avenue between 137<sup>th</sup> and 139<sup>th</sup> Street with additional commercial along Claire Boulevard and 139<sup>th</sup> Street.

Overall, both teams were interested in residential and commercial corridors around Robbins Metra station leading to Robbins Park. Both teams also agreed that Claire Boulevard should be a focal point for development.



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## Key Person Interviews

CMAP & RTA staff and partners conducted confidential interviews with approximately 15 people representing a variety of interests, including: residents, business owners, developers, and community leaders. These interviews served as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of community dynamics to help inform the planning process and future development in Robbins. Long-time residents reflected that Robbins used to be “a self-contained community” – with nearby shops and services within a comfortable walking distance. Their memories included stories of bustling street life with restaurants, grocery stores and family-owned shops along Claire Boulevard that gave Robbins a special sense of place. The community remains committed to restoring Robbins and returning it to the vibrant community it once was.

Additional themes and desired amenities that were shared during key person interviews included:

- Access to local healthy food options.
- Local entertainment and recreation venues.
- Employment assistance and job training.
- Providing places for programming and activities for youth.
- Village beautification including: lighting, benches, and landscaping improvements.
- Retail shops, cafés, sandwich shops, book stores, and a dry cleaners.
- Attractive and affordable housing.
- Gateway signage on major streets to commemorate Robbins’ heritage.

## Focus Groups

The convening of sample affinity groups to participate in guided discussions also helped us better understand impacts of planning efforts on the wider community. The focus groups included staff from the Cook County Health Center, youth from Robbins Community Center, and students at a nearby high school. A focus group was also conducted with local real estate developers and business leaders in Robbins. The feedback from these discussions gave us a better understanding of the specific needs of the community.

### ***Robbins Health Center Focus Group***

Robbins Health Center is located in the industrial study area and sits just south of the Robbins Community Power site. We spoke with some doctors and medical professionals who work directly with Robbins residents here. They shared that the predominant health issues in the community are non-communicable, preventable diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and substance abuse. They expressed a desire to have some place comfortable to walk with patients and outlets for exercise and fresh air. They shared that the proposed Robbins Park will add significant restorative benefit for patients. Participants outlined numerous additional areas where they would like to see improvements including:



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- Improved access to fresh and healthy food options.
- Access to information on physical and mental health.
- Access to community spaces for physical exercise and community gathering.
- Improved lighting and public safety enhancements.
- Sidewalk improvements and reliable transportation.
- Employment assistance and youth programming.

### ***Robbins High-School Youth Focus Group***

The perspective of youth who live and play in the community is vital to informing the planning process. Many residents we talked to cited the need for additional academic, employment and recreational outlets for youth to protect them from negative influences. The high school students we spoke with ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old. Many are involved in sports at their school or at the Robbins Community Center. They indicated that they typically do not spend time in Robbins for activities aside from school. They travel to nearby communities like Crestwood, Chicago Ridge, and Blue Island because these communities have more recreational places that teens like to visit. Many travel by bike and don't use transit. When asked if they take the Metra, they all stated that they use it infrequently - mainly to visit downtown Chicago. Some students shared that they prefer to take the Metra from the Midlothian station however, because there are shops nearby and it feels safer to them. They suggested that improvements to the Robbins Metra station, such as landscaping, convenience stores, and an art center would encourage them to use the train more often.

### ***Robbins Community Center Youth Focus Group***

The Robbins Community Center is a nucleus for community activity in Robbins and one of the only recreational options for youth in the village. Parents and youth assemble here throughout the week for athletic and life-skills enrichment led by program managers. Our focus group consisted of youth 16 years old and younger who participate in programming at the Center. We also talked to some parents. All expressed that there isn't much to do in Robbins. Many desire to see things like: a candy shop, a dance studio, more park space, an arts center and more stores and restaurants near the Metra station. Adults describe a geographic divide between youth who live closer to Crestwood on the western side of the village and those who live east, closer to the Robbins Metra Station. The youth who live farther east have few options and feel abandoned and trapped. Residents we talked to, from parents to the Chief of Police, are concerned about the safety of youth in the Village. They fear that without more options, youth will become idle and vulnerable to trouble. Due to a lack of amenities, many youth currently abandon the village altogether and hang-out elsewhere in surrounding suburbs.



## Online Survey

An interactive, online engagement platform was designed to inform, educate and get feedback from residents about their preferences.<sup>43</sup> The online survey was launched June 1, 2018. Over a three month period, 52 people visited the site and 934 data points and comments were collected. Figure 4.3 shows a prototype of the home screen of the survey.

Figure 4.3. Home screen of online engagement tool



## Kiosk

A standalone kiosk with the online survey was stationed in Robbins Village Hall. The kiosk provided access to the online survey for those who may not have access to the internet at home or simply preferred to use the kiosk. Its presence also helped to educate and build awareness of the planning process. Overall, with both the kiosk and the online survey, users were given the opportunity to share their ideas regarding community amenities and services that they would like to see in Robbins. Of the 52 total participants, 35 completed the survey via the kiosk and 17 participants used a mobile device or PC.

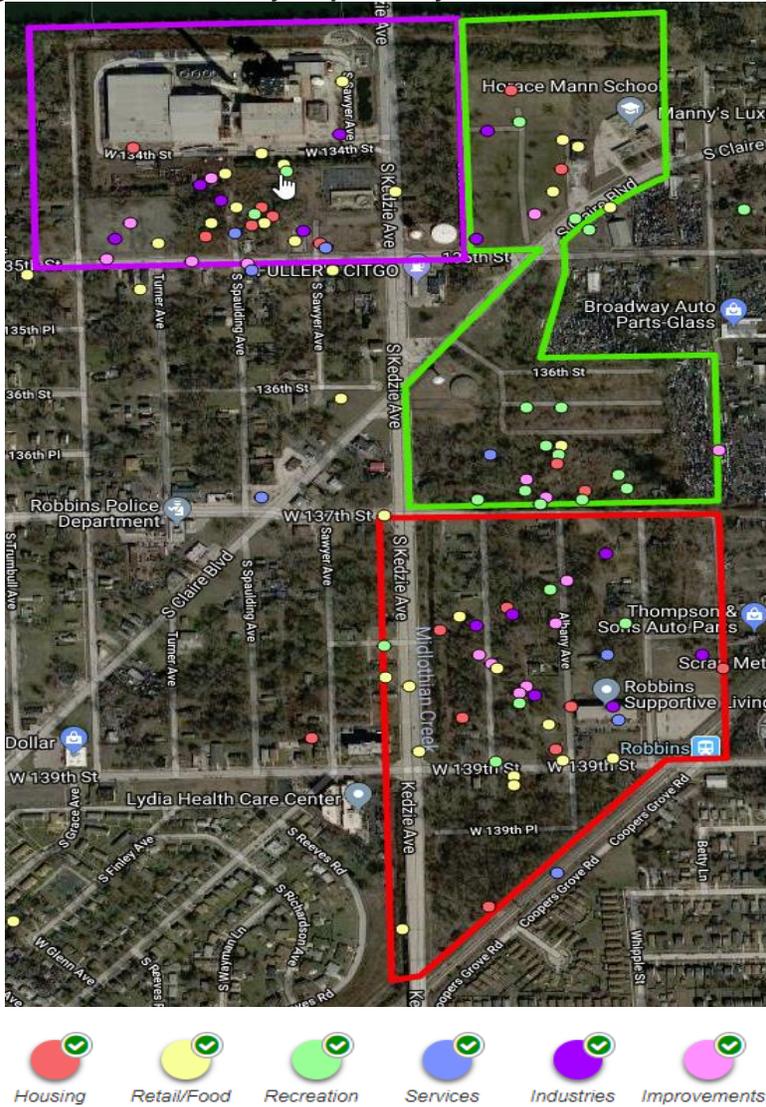
The map marker section of the survey allowed participants to drop markers on a map of the study area to highlight preferences for development and improvements (Figure 4.4). The dots correlate to categories including: Housing, Retail/Food, Recreation, Services, Industries, and Improvements. The area bounded in purple in the top left corner is where users gave input on industrial development while the section bordered in red shows desired development in the

<sup>43</sup> Robbins TOD and Industrial Plan online survey: <https://robbinstod.metroquest.com/>



primary TOD study area. As a result of community feedback, a secondary TOD boundary was later extended west along 139<sup>th</sup> Street to Claire Boulevard. The green section roughly outlines the proposed Robbins Park. While this area is not a part of the TOD and industrial study areas, many respondents shared ideas for development and improvements along the borders.

**Figure 4.4. Online Survey Map Activity**



Approximately 30 percent of survey respondents selected Retail and Food as their top choices for new businesses in the village, including a full-service sit-down restaurant. Many respondents specified that Claire Boulevard is a major corridor and noted their preference for a grocery store, a family-style restaurant, or a fast food option here. Personal services such as a dry cleaners, barber/beauty shops, banks, and a fitness center were also desired by participants in addition to a pharmacy, apparel stores, and a home goods store.

## Print and Advertising

Marketing materials were developed to inform the public about the planning process and to attract participants to scheduled events. An educational ad also ran on the village's cable television channel. In addition, posters and postcards were placed in common areas of high traffic like Village Hall, the post office and Robbins Community Center. Spanish marketing materials were also produced (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Spanish Marketing Postcard



**RESIDENTES DE ROBBINS  
¡QUEREMOS ESCUCHARLOS!**

Robbins tiene un patrimonio histórico rico de más de 100 años, gente apasionada y dedicada, una atractiva estación del Metra, está muy cerca de principales rutas de transporte. También se está preparando para una importante inversión en parques que fue premiada y que aliviará los riesgos de inundaciones, creará un espacio excitante para relajarse y jugar, y abrirá nuevas oportunidades para el desarrollo económico, la industria y la vivienda.

La Agencia Metropolitana de Chicago para la Planeación (CMAP, por sus siglas en inglés) y la Autoridad Regional de Transporte (RTA) están trabajando con la comunidad en un nuevo Plan Industrial y de Desarrollo Orientado al Transporte (DOT) con recomendaciones sobre cómo traer más empleos y desarrollo económico a nuestro poblado.

No podemos planificar el futuro de Robbins sin usted. Necesitamos su opinión. Comuníquese con Kelwin Harris, gerente de proyectos de CMAP ([kharris@cmapp.illinois.gov](mailto:kharris@cmapp.illinois.gov) o 312-386-8740) o comuníquese a las oficinas de Robbins al 708-385-8940 para obtener más información sobre las próximas reuniones. También conéctese con nosotros en línea de las siguientes maneras:

Visite nuestra página web  
[www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs/ita/robbins](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs/ita/robbins)

Síganos en Facebook  
[www.facebook.com/RobbinsTOD](http://www.facebook.com/RobbinsTOD)

Participe en una encuesta en línea  
<https://robbinstod.metroquest.com>

En asociación con



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Patrocinado por la Administración Federal de Autopistas, Administración Federal de Transporte, el Departamento de Vivienda y Desarrollo Urbano de los EE.UU., y el Chicago Community Trust.

FY18-0000

## Website and Facebook

Robbins TOD and Industrial Plan website was developed to act as the primary landing page for internet users seeking information about the project.<sup>44</sup> The site includes a description of the project scope, surveys, events, contact information, and important updates. The Facebook page<sup>45</sup> was another important tool for residents to actively engage on social media. In the course of the

<sup>44</sup> Robbins TOD and Industrial Project website: <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs/ita/robbins>

<sup>45</sup> Robbins TOD and Industrial Plan Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/RobbinsTOD/>



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planning process, the Village also created a new website [www.get2knowrobbins.org](http://www.get2knowrobbins.org) that contains the online survey, pictures from various outreach events and overall village updates. In addition, the Village published a widely disseminated print newsletter called the *Village Voyager* as another means of information sharing.



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